Happy New Year

On the occasion of the New Year's day, the *Tehran Times* staff extend their heartfelt congratulations to the Christians in Iran and everywhere else across the world. It is hoped that the New Year will be filled with prosperity for all.

Editor

TEHRAN TIMES

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Habibi Winds Up Visit to Tajikistan



HABIBI

By Soraya Dezhbankhan

TEHRAN — First Vice-President Hassan Habibi concluded his official three-day visit to the Republic of Tajikistan and arrived home Tuesday afternoon. Before leaving Dushanbe, Habibi had his second round of talks with Tajik President Imomali Rakhmanov on Tuesday.

Congratulating Rakhmanov on the peace accord signed between the Tajik government and the opposition, the vice-president described the national reconciliation in Tajikistan as a 'truning point' in the history of that country.

Also on Tuesday, some 10 memoranda of understanding was reached between Iran and Tajikistan on mutual cooperation in different areas. According to the documents signed by the two countries' officials, Iran and Tajikistan will cooperate in road and rail transportation, scientific and educational areas, post and telecommunications, health and customs affairs.

Oman, Qatar Freeze Normalization With Israel

MUSCAT — Oman has recalled its trade representative in Israel and may close its trade office there after deciding to freeze normalization of relations with the Zionist state, an Omani official said Tuesday.

The official, who requested anonymity, said Mohsen al-Balushi, the head of the Persian Gulf sultanate's trade office in Tel Aviv had been recalled for consultations because of "Israel's policy of blocking the peace process."

"The recall of Mr. Balushi may be the first step towards closing the Omani representation in Israel if it continues to refuse to implement the agreements with the Palestinians," the official said.

He said Balushi had been recalled recently but gave no date.

Muscat opened a trade office in Israel in August 1996.

But Oman's minister of state for foreign affairs, Yussef ibn Alawi Abdallah announced this month that Muscat was freezing the process of normalization of relations with Israel.

Another Persian Gulf monarchy, Qatar, which had also begun normalizing ties with the Zionist state, has also announced a freeze in further contacts with Israel because of the deadlock in the peace process since Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu took power in June.

(AFP)

Syria Keen to Maintain Strategic Alliance With Iran

BEIRUT — Syrian Vice President Abdel Halim Khaddam in an interveiw with the Lebanese newspaper *As-Safir*, reviewed Syria's ties with its neighbors, noting its continued "strategic" alliance with Iran and "better" ties with Turkey, although he called on Ankara to strengthen its relations with Arabs, instead of Israel.

He said, Damascus was opposed to "any attempt to partition Iraq, despite (Syria's) current conflict with the Baghdad regime."

Khaddam also ruled out any "serious" consolidation of ties with Palestinian President Yasser Arafat whom Syria accuses of having broken Arab ranks to sign peace agreements with Israel.



KHADDAM

"We are seeking to help the Palestinian people regain their rights . .. But where is now the cause of the Palestinian people? Arafat is now negotiating for a street in the (West Bank) city of Al-Khalil."

(Contd on Pg.14)

Israelis, Palestinians Drafting Al-Khalil Accord

BAIT-UL-MOQADDAS — Israeli and Palestinian negotiators have overcome their differences on a handover of Al-Khalil, setting aside the issue of security at a shrine in the West Bank city for a summit meeting, a Palestinian official said Tuesday.

Palestinian security chief General Adel Razek Yehiya said negotiators had begun drafting the agreement on a transfer of Al-Khalil to Palestinian self-rule and the long-awaited accord could be signed on Tuesday.

(Contd on Pg.14)

France Warns Belgrade It Risks Isolation

MILOSEVIC MAY AGREE TO RECOGNIZE POLL RESULTS



BELGRADE, Yugoslavia (December 30): Riot policemen are bombarded with snow from opposition supporters standing on balconies along the route of a students' march on the streets of Belgrade.

(AFP PHOTO)

PARIS — France warned Belgrade on Tuesday that it risked increasing isolation if it refused to implement the recommendations

(Contd on Pg.14)





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And when the Qoran is recited, then listen to it and remain silent, that mercy may be shown to you.

(HOLY QORAN) (7:204)

OPINION

Should Afghanistan's Seat in UN Be Taken by Taleban?

The Taleban have appealed to the new UN Secretary General Kofi Annan to be allowed to take Afghanistan's seat in the world body.

There is a contradiction in Taleban's logic for taking the seat. In order to justify their demand, they have written to the UN chief that the seat should go to "The real heir and representatives of the Afghan people's will: the newly established Islamic [sic] government."

There is a fact in the Taleban's demand, i.e., the seat should go to the real representatives of the Afghan people. But the result that the Taleban infer from this established fact is not sound because the Taleban by no means can prove that they are the real representatives of the Afghan people.

First of all, they do not represent the women who constitute a great portion of the Afghan population, since they have reduced the women in the war-torn country to inmates of their four walls. How can the warden represent the inmate?

Secondly, the Taleban have come to power neither through direct ballots nor indirect votes. They have seized power through the barrels of gun and cannon. Unfortunately, after coming to power, the Taleban have mercilessly abused their power, suppressing the women and the opposition. They have introduced inhuman rules and regulations reminiscent of the mediaeval era. Furthermore, the rules and regulations introduced by the Taleban neither conform with Islamic teachings nor precepts.

If the UN recognizes the Taleban, such a recognition will be tantamount to legitimizing atrocities committed against women, children, and humanity. It will definitely set a horrible precedence in the history of state which is a disgusting treason to the cause of humanity.

Kofi Annan shoulders a great responsibility at this crucial juncture in the history of Afghanistan.

In the name of humanity, do not politicize the crisis in Afghanistan. The performance of the group is the best criterion for judging it. Recognition of Taleban is tantamount to legitimizing crime.

President Urges Ulema to Meet Spiritual Needs of the Youth

Tehran Times Service

TEHRAN — President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, on a tour to Ilam, called on ulema to meet the intellectual needs of the youth.

According to IRNA, the president made the remark in a meeting with the theological students and ulema of the province.

He said that ulema are duty bound to upgrade their knowledge on Islam and present it to the people in a way understandable to the people today.

He urged ulema to make people know that religion is capable of responding to their needs.

Turning to the trend of development in the country, he said by demonstrating its independence to the world and as a degnified model, Iran can be effective in introducing Islam.


Photo: Abbas Takin

Addressing a large gathering of the people in the Ilam provincial city of Shirvan earlier on the day, the president said that the brave Iranian nation through its Jihad, effort, construction and fight against tyranny and oppression has freed itself from the yoke of satan and colonialism.

Through patience and perseverance against hardship, the nation helped the sacred sovereign nation of the Islamic Republic of Iran to implement its various giant reconstruction projects throughout the country, Rafsanjani stated.

The president went on to say that nation also helped the government invest in the reconstruction projects as soon as the eight-year imposed war (1980-1988) came to an end.

Calling Basij, the personnel of the Armed Forces and the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC) as the nation's assets, he stated that the nation of Islamic Iran by its patience and contentment had helped prepare the ground for reconstruction of the country. Rafsanjani said that Iran has been converted into a big construction workshop.

Referring to the state of deprivity which had prevailed in the country during the tyranical regime of the Shah, President Rafsanjani said that at that time the Iranian women were deprived of their basic rights and that illiteracy posed a big difficulty whereas today, female students make up half of the university, school and high school population.

The president also paid a visit to Darrehshahr of Ilam on Tuesday.

In his speech delivered at a gathering of local people, the president said that warm welcome accorded by the people encourages government officials to provide more services.

On Tuesday, the president addressed a group of people of Abdanan saying that the Iranian women should increase their presence in different social activities.

Today, the Iranian women share the same social rights with men, he said adding that increasing educational level and paying more attention to educational affairs of men and women paves the ground for reconstruction of the country.

Habibi Calls For Expansion of Tehran-Dushanbe Cultural Ties

Tehran Times Service

TEHRAN — First Vice President Hassan Habibi in Dushanbe Monday called for expansion of cultural cooperation between Iran and Tajikistan, an IRNA report said.

Addressing professors, students and staff of the State University of Tajikistan, Habibi called for paying more attention to cultural activities throughout the region.

He stressed that scientific and historical research, painting exhibitions, archeology and linguistics will be among different fields in which the two countries can establish cooperation.

Referring to immense potentials in both countries, he called for exploiting these potentials for promotion of peace and security in the region as well as social and cultural development.

Habibi was awarded an honorary degree from the Tajik state university.

Meanwhile, the vice president on Monday afternoon inspected a cultural center at Tajik Science College, where handwritten manuscripts are kept.

Some 12,000 handwritten books in different languages including Persian, Arabic, Turkish and other Eastern languages are kept in the center.

Habibi, heading a high-ranking politico-economic delegation, arrived here on Sunday on a three-day visit.

Drug Traffickers Arrested in Isfahan

Tehran Times Service

TEHRAN — An official of the provincial Law Enforcement Forces, Morteza Habibi, said in Isfahan Tuesday that following gunbattles 21 drug traffickers were arrested and 203.5 kg of opium and heroin were seized from them.

According to IRNA, the gang of drug smugglers, involved in supply and distribution of narcotic drugs, has been routed by the forces.

The gang was active in provinces of Isfahan, Sistan-Baluchestan, Tehran, Fars, Kerman, Ilam and Khuzestan, he added.

Iran's Population Estimated Over 58 Million So Far

Tehran Times Service

TEHRAN — Head of the Statistics Center of Iran, Abbas Ali Zali, said here Monday that according to the census questionaires of 12.108 million families which have been processed so far Iran's population stands at 58.3 million.

The population growth rate has been below the predicted rate, he said adding that this indicates success of the population control programs.

The second nationwide public census on population and houses since the victory of the 1979 Islamic Revolution, which was conducted in October, has put Tehran population at about seven million.

Rafsanjani Condoles Malaysian King, PM

Tehran Times Service

TEHRAN — President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani on Tuesday cabled separate messages to the Malaysian King Jafar and Premier Mahathir Mohammad, expressing grief over the death of more than 170 people due to the floods in that country.

The president, in his messages, extended the heartfelt condolences of the Iranian government and nation to the people of Malaysia, praying to the Almighty God for their prosperity.

President Inaugurates Hundreds of Projects in Ilam

Tehran Times Service

TEHRAN - 101 telecommunication projects completed at a cost of Rls.73 billion were put into operation at presence of President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani Monday evening throughout this western province.

Speaking on the occasion the president said that his administration places a great importance on development of telecommunication network in the country, IRNA reported.

Meanwhile, 13 industrial and manufacturing projects were inaugurated in different parts of the province by President Rafsanjani.

Over Rls.10 billion have been spent on these projects which include chemical dye, soap, aluminium utensil, leather products, poly-ethylene and detergent producing factories.

Furthermore, some 185 development and industrial projects, built at a cost of Rls.95 billion, were inaugurated by President Rafsanjani in rural and urban regions of the province Monday.

President Rafsanjani, heading a high-ranking delegation, arrived in Ilam province Monday morning on a four-day visit.

Further Expansion of Irano-Tajik Economic Relations Urged

Tehran Times Service

TEHRAN - Visiting Iranian First Vice-President Hassan Habibi and the Tajik Chairman of Supreme Assembly Safar-Ali Rajabov in a meeting in Dushanbe Monday exchanged views on the regional peace and tranquillity and Irano-Tajik economic, trade and technical relations as well as bilateral cooperation between the parliaments of the two countries.

In the meeting, Habibi termed peace and tranquillity as the most basic need of the region particularly of the Tajikistan, saying that by taking into account special condition of the region the officials of the two nations should focus their efforts in order to further bring about unity, peace and national solidarity, IRNA reported from Dushanbe.

He asked the Tajik Parliament to make more efforts in order to help Tehran-Dushanbe expansion of bilateral relations in economic, trade and technical sectors in addition to the already existing political and cultural relations.

Habibi added that the setting up of the parliamentary relations and the formation of the parliamentary friendship groups would help the two nations' promote their relations.

He indicated that the enforcement of the earlier agreements particularly the agreement on the encouragement of investments in either country would help expedite trade exchange and increase in the volume of trade.

(Contd on Pg. 15)

Iran's Exclusive Fair to Open in Beirut

Tehran Times Service

TEHRAN - Iran's tenth exclusive exhibition is to open in Beirut on January 2, manager of the fair Majid Qasemi Feiz-Abadi, said on Tuesday.

According to the official, 110 Iranian companies will put their products on display in a 5,800-square-meter plot of land, IRNA reported.

Among other things, Feiz-Abadi said, the exhibition is aimed at getting Asian and Arab peoples to know more about one another's facilities, acquiring full knowledge of different markets, tastes, social and economic behaviors, new technical achievements and utilizing one another's abilities.

He added that for the first time, a conference will be held on the sidelines of the exhibition in order to introduce Iranian-made goods.

Lorestan Exports 1m kg of Non-Oil Goods

Tehran Times Service

TEHRAN - More than one million kg of non-oil commodities worth $2.2 million have been exported abroad from Lorestan province this year, head of provincial customs office Gholamreza Daraei said Tuesday.

The goods including animal intestine, clothes, apples and garlic were exported to Central Asian states, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates and Italy, he added, IRNA reported.

Leader Inspects Tehran's Subway Site



TEHRAN - A little girl offers a bunch of flower to the Leader of Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei at Jahan-e-Koodak subway station here yesterday.

Tehran Times Service

TEHRAN - Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei here on Tuesday inspected construction work on Tehran's subway, its tunnles and several stations.

Tehran's subway is passing its final phases for two main lines linking central part of Tehran to its suburbs, IRNA reported.

Accompanied by Minister of Interior Ali Mohammad Besharati, Minister of Roads and Transport Akbar Torkan and Tehran's Mayor Gholam-Hussein Karbaschi, the leader was briefed on various stages of the subway's construction by the manager of the project Ibrahimi.

The leader attended a meeting of the engineers and technicians now carrying out the subway project and in a brief address appreciated their hard work, initiatives and technical know-how.

The leader said the Iranian nation is proud that the subway is now being built by Iranian experts themslelves.

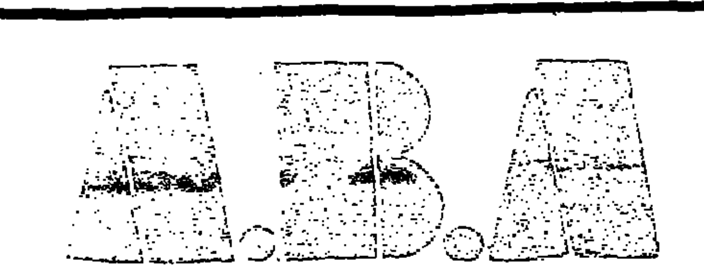
Iranian engineers and technicians are now working out the project without any foreign assistance, the leader said, adding that the next generation will be proud of this great work.

Ayatollah Khamenei said, "Iranian scientists and innovators have undergone a qualitative progress by building the subway."

The supreme leader recommended the architects and engineers to observe traditional and Islamic architecture in designing and decorating the subway stations.

Before the leader's remarks, manager of the project Ibrahimi said 42 km of subway tunnels had been dug, 53 stations built and 60 km of surface roads constructed along with 500,000 square meters of shelter and 100,000 square meters of shopping centers.

He said 21 million cubic meters of earth had been dug out and 2.2 million cubic meters of concret used in building the subway.



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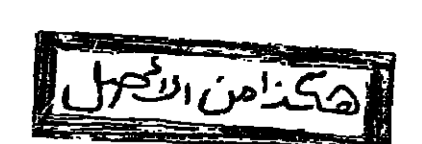
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SPORTS SUMMARY

Tehran Times Service

FOOTBALL

Clark Vows to Stop the Rot

LONDON: Frank Clark vowed to halt Manchester City's slide towards oblivion and lead the club back to the glory days as he began his reign in the hot seat at the first division strugglers.

Clark, who took over on Sunday evening after the resignation of caretaker manager Phil Neal, will be treading a well-worn path at the helm of a club which has fallen from premiership challengers to the brink of the second division in six years.

Clark becomes the 15th manager appointed by City in just 25 years and more significantly the sixth since the beginning of the 1990s.

He said he only accepted the job after receiving assurances that he could be his own man and take fulll charge of the footballing side.

City Show the Door to Book

LONDON: Manchester City and their former manager and skipper Tony Book went their different ways on Monday to sever a link with City's Halcyon Days at the top.

Book joined City in 1966 and captained the side to the league championship in 1968, the FA Cup a year later and the League Cup and European Cup Winners' Cup the following season.

He was dismissed following Frank Clark's arrival as manager to replace caretaker boss Phil Neal.

Scala Joins Perugia

PERUGIA: Nevio Scala was appointed coach of Perugia to end speculation in Italy over the ex-Parma boss' future.

Perugia, newly promoted and mid-table in the Serie A, were successful in bringing in Scala after recent talks with him about signing Roberto Baggio on loan from AC Milan and winning a UEFA Cup slot at the end of the season.

The decision poured cold water on talk that the former Parma coach was biding his time for a possible imminent return to his old club. The recent form of Parma, among the title favorites before the season started, has been poor.

Duffy Joins Hibs

LONDON: Jim Duffy was named as the new boss of Scottish premier division side Hibernian after he quit first division Dundee.

Duffy's arrival at Easter Road could signal the departure of caretaker Jocky Scott, who has been in charge since Alex Miller's resignation at the end of September.

Duffy signaled his intention to leave Dundee on Sunday by telling club shareholders at their annual general meeting his "credibility" was in jeopardy because of the way the club is run.

Sampdoria Vow to Keep Karembeu

MADRID: Sampdoria have vowed to hang onto French international midfielder Christian Karembeu until his contract expires in 1998, rather than offload him to Real Madrid or Barcelona.

"We will hang onto him even if it costs the club money," Sampdoria President Enrico Mantovani said following a dinner to mark Sunday's friendly between the Italian outfit and Real.

Spanish league leaders Real have offered 500 million pesetas (some 3.8 million dollars) for Karembeu, 25, who is also being tracked by Catalan giants Barcelona.

Lens' Rychkov Caught Doping

PARIS: FC Lens' Russian star Sasha Rychkov became the seventh French first division player to be caught doping in the past year after testing positive for cocaine.

Rychkov, 22, who arrived from Irkutsk at the start of the season, was found to have taken the drug after the game with Strasbourg on November 23, officials said.

TENNIS

Rosset Inspires Swiss to Win

PERTH: Switzerland's Marc Rosset overcame a painful back injury as he partnered teenager Martina Hingis to victory over Romania on the second day of the Hopman Cup mixed team tournament.

Switzerland took the tie 2-1, with Rosset and Hingis clinching the crucial mixed doubles against Adrian Voinea and Irina Spilea 3-6, 7-5, 6-3 after Hingis captured the women's singles, beating Spirlea 7-5, 6-2.

South Africa Open With Win

PERTH: Third-seeded South African pair Wayne Ferreira and Amanda Coetzer began their challenge for the Hopman Cup title in promising fashion by defeating unseeded Germany.

Ferreira outwitted Bernd Karbacher in the men's singles after Coetzer had overwhelmed Petra Begerow in the women's singles on the second day of the U.S.$640,000 eight-nation contest at Burswood Dome.

Ferreira, 25, defeated the 28-year-old Bernd Karbacher 6-4,6-4 in 80 minutes, while Coetzer outclassed Begerow 6-0,7-5.



TEHRAN (Dec. 31) — Parliament Speaker Ali Akbar Nateq Nouri in a meeting with the members of Iranian national soccer team awards Bahar-e Azadi gold coins.
Photo: Abbas Kowsari

Metrostars Sign Brazil's World Cup Coach to Two-Year Contract

NEWARK, New Jersey — Carlos Alberto Parreira, who coached Brazil to the 1994 World Cup title, signed a two-year contract with the New York-New Jersey Metrostars, the major league soccer team announced Monday.

Parreira, 53, a Brazilian, is known as a master strategist but not for his boldness in tactics. He most recently took over FC Sao Paulo in Brazil partway through the last season. After the World Cup victory, he coached Seville of Spain, and the next season won the Turkish league title with Fenerbahce.

Terms of Parreira's contract were not disclosed. He becomes the third coach for the Metrostars. The team, and major league soccer, enter their second season this spring.

"This is a very exciting opportunity for me as a coach," Parreira said in a statement issued by the Metrostars. Parreira, who is on vacation in Brazil, said he was "very impressed with the club's commitment to excellence and the plan for the future."

Parreira has been pursued by many teams, including the U.S. national team in 1995. He has a natural fan base in the Newark area, which has a sizable Brazilian and Portuguese population.

The Metrostars spoke to him prior to their first season, mainly for his evaluation of other candidates, said general manager Charlie Stillitano. At the time, Parreira was already committed to Fenerbahce.

"We are very excited about it. It has been a long, arduous process, but we were able to pull it off," Stillitano said.

Parreira chose the Metrostars offer over others from the national team of Saudi Arabia and teams in Brazil, Italy, Japan and Spain, Stillitano said.

The deal was discussed earlier this month, while the coach and his family spent a week in New York, he said.

"We're looking for a coach who is going to be with us for the long term, and who is going to develop our players," Stillitano said.

"I called the players this morning, and they were all, to a man, extremely excited." Stillitano said. And far as recruiting: "It will only help."

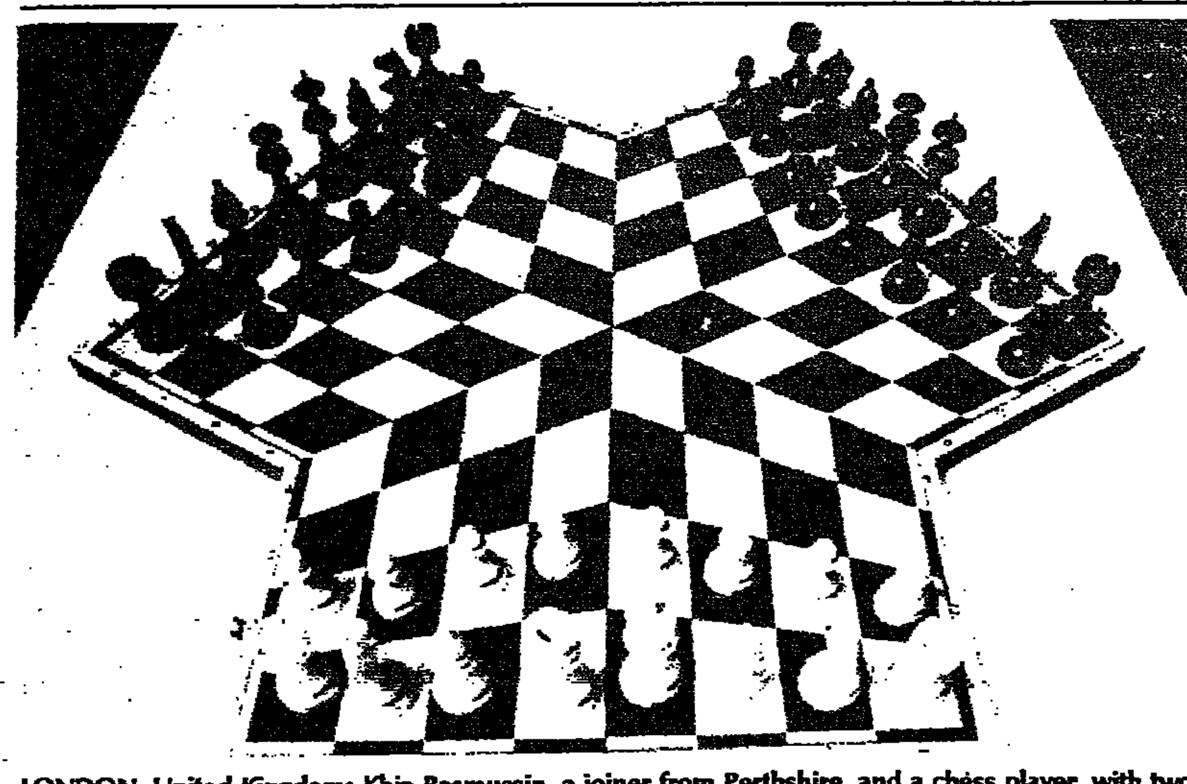
In the team's first season, coach Eddie Firmani resigned after a 3-5 start. Carlos Queiroz took the team as far as the Eastern Conference semifinal, then left to coach Grampus eight of Japan's J-League.

Parreira led the Brazilian team twice, in 1986-87 and during the 1994 World Cup campaign, compiling a record of 28-13-5.

He coached Fluminese to the rio championship in 1975 and later won the Brazilian title with that club in 1984.

In 1982, he coached Kuwait's national team, and in 1990 led the United Arab Emirates team into World Cup play. Only one other coach, Bora Milutinovic, has led three different national teams into World Cup play.

Parreira started with the Brazilian national team in 1970 as the physical preparation manager for the Pele-led World Cup champions. (AP)



LONDON, United Kingdom: Khia Rasmussin, a joiner from Perthshire, and a chess player, with two friends, set about inventing a version of the game that could be played by three people simultaneously. Eleven years later and 40,000 pounds sterling of investment, three-way chess is about to be launched by a British-based games company. Undated photo shows the new board and pieces.
(AFP PHOTO)

Deportivo Back Down Over Federation Sanction

MADRID — Deportivo la Coruna said Monday it was ready to drop a threat to ignore a Spanish Football Federation sanction forcing the closure of its ground for one game following crowd violence.

World football body FIFA had been set to intervene after the club said it would play its January 4 encounter with Barcelona in its Riazor Stadium regardless of a federation ruling that the ground must close after coins were thrown at the referee during a recent game there.

Deportivo President Augusto Cesar Lendoiro took the matter to a Madrid court which found that the ruling should be suspended, thus allowing the game to go ahead in principle.

But FIFA, which does not allow affiliated clubs to contest judgments by national associations in the courts, reacted furiously fearing that the slow-moving wheels of the judicial process would leave the matter to fester for years.

FIFA thus demanded that Deportivo back down by Tuesday or face suspension from all competitions and possibly even relegation.

Lendoiro had hoped to have the association ruling declared invalid by the Spanish courts or even the European Court of Justice or, failing that, at least spin the matter out until after the lucrative match with Barcelona.

But those hopes were dashed when the rest of Spain's leading clubs failed to back his stand.

Deportivo eventually decided it had no choice but to comply with the federation's ruling, although it asked that it be applied after the Barca clash. The league had not responded to that request late Monday. (AFP)



AL-KHALIL (December. 30): Israeli police check the car of a Palestinian in the center of the West Bank city of Al-Khalil. An Israeli-Palestinian accord on the handover of Al-Khalil to the Palestinian Authority could be signed as early as December 31, Israeli and Palestinian officials said on December 30 ahead of a decisive round of negotiations on the delayed Israeli withdrawal, initially planned for March.

(AFP PHOTO)

Russian Troops Leave Strategic Grozny Airport

MOSCOW — Russian troops have finally evacuated the civilian airport north of the Chechen capital Grozny, a key base for Russian forces throughout the 21-month conflict in the breakaway southern republic, Interfax news agency reported Tuesday.

In line with an overall evacuation from the north Caucasus republic, the last Russian troops pulled out of the airport on Monday night, leaving only units of the presidential guard in place at the strategic site, the agency quoted military sources as saying.

Grozny's civilian airport was one of two main military Russian bases in Chechnya through the war.

Interfax also quoted army sources in Moscow as saying the troop pull-out would continue with the last Defense Ministry units of the 205th brigade leaving Chechnya by Tuesday.

Russian military officials have offered several alternative dates as the definitive deadline for the troop withdrawal.

Interfax quoted military officials on Monday as saying that the last remaining auxiliary units of the Russian Army would be pulled out within a week.

But the commander of Russian troops in Chechnya, Vladimir Sukhoruchenko later denied the information, promising only that troops would have left before presidential elections are held in the republic on January 27.

(AFP)

Turkish Military Enters Northern Iraq to Hunt Kurds

ANKARA — Several thousand Turkish troops entered northern Iraq on Tuesday to hunt down Kurdish separatists who had attacked Turkish targets from bases there, the military said.

Forty-three separatists from the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and two Turkish soldiers were killed in northern Iraq in an ensuing operation by a "brigade-sized" unit, the Turkish general staff said in a statement.

"The ground and air operations are continuing," it said, adding between 100 and 120 PKK separatists had been spotted in the Sinath area in northern Iraq opposite the Turkish border town of Silopi.

(AFP)

Kashmir Imposes Ban on Public Meetings, Speeches

NEW DELHI — Officials have banned public meetings and speeches for two months in Srinagar, the summer capital of Kashmir state, to pre-empt separatist violence, officials said Tuesday.

The Press Trust of India quoted officials as saying in Srinagar that the ban, enforced on Monday, outlawed the gathering of more than five persons in public and the use of loudhailers for public addresses.

They said the carrying of arms had also been banned for two months.

Officials gave no reason for the ban, which comes ahead of India's Republic Day on January 26 — an event during which Muslim activists fighting Indian rule in Kashmir traditionally launch attacks.

(AFP)

Sudan Protests at Opposition Leader Mahdi's Visit to Egypt

CAIRO — Sudan has protested at former Prime Minister Sadek al-Mahdi's visit to Egypt, saying Cairo's welcome for the exiled opposition leader did not show "good intentions" towards Khartoum.

Mahdi, who fled his homeland for Eritrea this month, visited Cairo Friday for the first time since 1987 on the opening leg of a three-month tour of Arab and European countries.

Egypt's charge d'affaires in Khartoum, Ramadan al-Sherif, was informed by the Sudanese Foreign Ministry of the government's "discontent," an Egyptian Foreign Ministry official said.

Sudanese officials also expressed "Khartoum's dissatisfaction about the Sudanese opposition activities" in Egypt, the official added.

Mahdi, Sudan's first democratically elected prime minister, was toppled in a bloodless military coup in 1989 which brought an Islamist-military junta led by Omar al-Beshir to power.

The leader of the northern opposition party Umma said he fled Sudan in early December to prevent the Sudanese regime from using him as a "hostage."

(AFP)

Bodies of Five Murdered Belgians in Morgue

ASMARA - The remains of five Belgian tourists killed by unidentified assailants in northern Eritrea were taken to the morgue at a hospital in Asmara, officials here said Tuesday.

National radio reported Monday that the bodies of five Belgians — four women and a man — and an Eritrean were found Saturday in the Felfel region, some 100 kilometres (60 miles) from the capital.

The radio did not give details but said the Interior Ministry was investigating the killings.

The victims' families were alerted Monday, and Eritrean authorities were waiting for instructions from the relatives, the Foreign Ministry here said.

Authorities here did not name the victims.

The Eritrean victim was buried Monday in Dekembare, some 40 kilometres (25 miles) south of Asmara.

A Belgian diplomat based in Ethiopia on Tuesday said he was heading immediately for Asmara but refused to comment on the killings.

Belgium does not have an embassy in this northeast African country. Eritrea, an Italian colony between 1890 and 1941, became a British protectorate and then a province of Ethiopia before gaining independence in 1993.

(AFP)

Kabul Airport Bombed as Taleban Extends Control North

KABUL — The Kabul international airport came under air attack Tuesday as opposition forces launched a brief New Year's eve raid in response to gain north of the Afghan capital by the Taleban militia.

The end of year attack came as the fundamentalist Taleban were moving north to extend their control from Kabul, the prize they were fighting for 12 months earlier.

Major hospitals in Kabul reported no casualties from the air raid, most likely by jets of northern warlord General Abdul Rashid Dostam, a key member of the anti-Taleban alliance.

There has been an upsurge in air attacks on Kabul in recent days following opposition military setbacks in the highly publicised battles as the Taleban move north from the capital.

The raid took place at 2:50 a.m. (2220 GMT monday), awakening the sleeping capital as a barrage of anti-aircraft fire lept into the sky from the many gunner units based in the capital.

The major hospitals in Kabul reported no casualties.

The attack, most likely by jets of northern warlord General Abdul Rashid Dostam, a key member of the anti-Taleban alliance, was part of what appears to be a upsurge in raids on the capital in a response to opposition military setbacks north of the capital.

Residents living close to the airport confirmed that a single bomb fell within its perimeter, but airport officials said there was no damage.

One of the first flights to arrive at the airport on Tuesday was a United Nations flight, and officials at the airport vehemently denied that the attacks would discourage the operation of the national airline, Ariana, which has resumed some international flights.

Meanwhile, the Taleban have appealed to the new secretary general of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, to be allowed to take Afghanistan's seat in the world body.

Annan should use his influence to ensure the seat goes to "the real heir and representatives of the Afghan people's will: the newly established Islamic government," said a letter from Mullah Mohammed Rabbani, acting head of the Taleban's interim ruling council, broadcast on Taleban-controlled radio Shariat on Monday night.

Afghanistan's seat is held by Abdur Rahim Ghaffoorzai, a representative of the government of President Burhanuddin Rabbani.

(AFP)

(Contd from Pg. 1)

FRANCE...

of an OSCE report urging it to recognize the opposition victory in municipal elections.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Jacques Rummelhardt called on Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic to offer talks as quickly as possible with opposition protestors on the streets of the Serbian capital.

"If the Serbian authorities refuse a full and honest implementation of the recommendations, they risk isolation and will be turning their backs on the full reintegration of (Belgrade) into the international community," he said.

"We warn them against any such temptation. We therefore today again call for restraint, but above all for the rapid start of a real dialogue with the opposition," he added.

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) report compiled by former Spanish Premier Felipe Gonzalez said Belgrade should recognize the opposition victory in 14 towns and cities.

Rummelhardt said French Foreign Minister Herve de Charette would raise the issue in a telephone conversation Tuesday with his Yugoslav counterpart Milan Milutinovic.

The Vienna-based OSCE issued its report Friday after Gonzalez headed a fact-finding international panel of investigators that visited Belgrade last week.

In particular Gonzalez said: "It is my opinion that both the authorities and all political forces in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia must accept and abide by the results as reflected in the above conclusions."

Rummelhardt said France and Europe were agreed to put pressure on Belgrade to comply with the OSCE report's recommendations.

Paris "proposed . . that the European Union press their firmest support for the recommendations of this report with the highest authorities in Serbia," he said.

"Our European partners expressed their full support for this proposal, which should be implemented in the very near future.

Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic may be ready to recognize opposition wins in last month's local elections in line with the recommendations of international mediators, a European diplomatic source said here Tuesday.

A Dutch diplomat with an EU delegation holding talks with officials in Belgrade said Milosevic could accept the findings of a team of mediators from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), which urged Belgrade to recognize the results of the November 17 polls.

(AFP)

(Contd from Pg. 1)

SYRIA...

He also said Syria is still awaiting the fulfilment of U.S. promises for a complete Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights, Vice President Abdel Halim Khaddam said on Tuesday.

"The U.S. offered us written commitments for an Israeli withdrawal up to the June 4, 1967, border lines and we will not accept any negotiations below that level," Khaddam said in an interview with the Lebanese newspaper As-Safir.

"We are still waiting for the U.S. to keep its promises (on the withdrawal) and for the resumption of the peace talks from where they left off," he said. "But the question is, will Israel comply with this?"

Peace talks between Israel and Syria were suspended in February and hinge on Syria's demand for a complete return of the Golan Heights, seized by Israel in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war and annexed in 1981.

"Damascus was told by Washington that Israel does not intend to launch a war against Syria and we have said that, besides our desire and decision for achieving peace, we will not be lenient to any aggression that might occur," Khaddam said.

(AFP)

(Contd from Pg. 1)

ISRAELI...

"We are in the phase of drafting. There are no points of difference. There may be a signing today," he told reporters as he left the room at a hotel here where Israeli and Palestinian negotiators were meeting.

Netanyahu has taken a tough stance on the Palestinian demand for a security role in guarding the Cave of the Patriarchs, Al-Khalil's central religious site.

"I will only sign an accord on Hebron if it guarantees our control over the Tomb of the Patriarchs and the security of the Jewish residents," the Israeli premier told Parliament on Monday.

Aside from security differences, talks have stuck over Israeli demands for control of building rights in and around Jewish settlements and Palestinian demands for Israeli commitments to take further steps in the spread of self-rule after a Al-Khalil handover.

Two Egyptian officials are due in Gaza on Tuesday to help the Palestinians with the drafting of an agreement on Israel's military withdrawal from the West Bank city of Al-Khalil, an Egyptian official said.

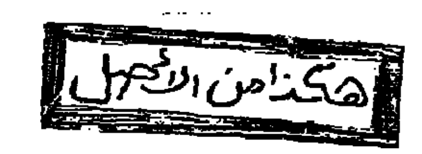
The two are Nabil Fahmy, political adviser to Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Mussa and Mufid Shehab, a professor of international law at the University of Cairo, the official said.

Egypt, the Palestinian Authority's main Arab ally, provided legal aid to the Palestinians during the negotiations on the 1995 Oslo self-rule accords.

Palestinian security chief General Abdel Razek Yehiya said earlier Tuesday that negotiators had begun drafting the agreement on a transfer of Al-Khalil to Palestinian self-rule and the long-awaited accord could be signed on Tuesday.

However, he said the question of security at Al-Khalil's cave of the patriarchs, sacred to both Muslims and Jews, had not yet been resolved, and would be set aside for a summit between Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian President Yasser Arafat.

(AFP)



WEATHER

The Islamic Republic of Iran Meteorological Organization announced today's weather as follows:

Forecast for Tehran: Max. temp. 15°C, Min. temp. 5°C

Clear to half cloudy

Warmest Point: Minab 27°C

Coldest Point: Firoozkouh -8°C

Some cities of the world

Cities	Max °C	Cities	Max °C
Riyadh	24	Vienna	–
Istanbul	–	Moscow	–
Rome	–	Madrid	1
Athens	18	Abu Dhabi	–
London	-1	Karachi	28
Paris	-6	New Delhi	20
Frankfurt	-11	Kuwait	22

Opposition Supporters Defy Prime Minister's Attacks

SINGAPORE – Thousands of opposition supporters Tuesday swamped the financial heart of Singapore in a show of support for a candidate singled out for attack by Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong ahead of Thursday's elections.

Some 5,000 people jammed a riverside plaza in the banking district for a lunchtime rally of the Workers' Party (WP) featuring lawyer Tang Liang Hong, accused by Goh of being a dangerous man who could ignite ethnic passions.

Speaking from a stage with a red banner saying "Save Singapore, not Goh Chok Tong," Tang and party leader J.B. Jeyaretnam assailed the ruling People's Action Party (PAP) before an audience that far outnumbered a PAP meeting on the same spot the day before.

Tang, 61, challenged Goh to a televised debate and accused the ruling party of "playing with fire" by accusing him of being a "chauvinist" out to stir passions among the ethnic Chinese majority against the multi-racial island's English-educated, Christian elite.

Singapore television, however, said Goh had ruled out any debate, saying his differences with Tang ought to be settled in a court of law

Tang, who was largely known only in Chinese cultural circles before being thrust to national prominence by PAP attacks, has threatened to sue Goh and former Premier Lee Kuan Yew for defamation. They have dared him to go ahead.

The PAP, in power for 37 years now, is already assured a majority with the opposition contesting less than half the 83 seats, but has trained its guns on a hotly contested district, Cheng San, where Tang and Jeyaretnam are leading a five-man team in Thursday's general elections.

(AFP)

Central African Capital Calm a Day After Clashes Leave Four Dead

BANGUI - Calm returned to the capital of the Central African republic Tuesday a day after clashes between mutinous soldiers and troops loyal to the government left four people dead.

Military checkpoints blocking access to the city center were lifted when a daily curfew ended at 5:00 a.m.

Isolated shots were heard overnight from Petevo, a suburban district controlled by the rebellious soldiers since November 15.

Their revolt began over wages and conditions but then spread to include calls for the resignation of President Ange-Felix Patasse's resignation.

In Monday's fighting the rebels had taken up positions in Kouanga, between Petevo and the city center, but have since redeployed back to Petevo, sources said.

Kouanga is now controlled by French soldiers who are here supporting the government.

The clashes shattered a truce in force since December 5.

They occurred around midday during an anti-government demonstration attended by several thousand people calling for Patasse's resignation, the removal of barricades in place in some areas of the city and the end to the intervention of the French forces.

(AFP)

38 Sicilian Mafiosi Sentenced in Last Round of Multiple Trials

PALERMO, Sicily – Thirty eight Mafiosi were sentenced Tuesday to a total of more than 300 years in prison in the last round of multiple trials of suspected members of the Sicilian Mafia.

The 38 were sentenced to a total of 328 years, while 16 others were found not guilty. The heaviest sentence was handed down to Salvatore lo Piccolo, head of the Sán Lorenzo clan, who was sentenced to 24 years in jail.

The Sicilian Mafia trials were launched in 1987 by Judge Giovanni Falcone, who was subsequently killed in a blast in May 1992. (AFP)

British Referendum Party Embarrassed by Top Official's Attack

LONDON – Britain's Referendum Party was embarrassed on Tuesday after a top official quit his post, launching a blistering attack on the group, which he said was run by political "amateurs" and had tiny support.

Former Conservative Party agent John Bostock, who resigned as one of the party's regional campaign managers, said the organization had no more than 15,000 supporters throughout Britain. The party claims to have 50,000.

"Fifteen thousand out of 58 million people is a drop in the ocean. It is a nothing party," he told Britain's Press Association.

The group is headed by Sir James Goldsmith, who is a Euro MP and who set up the Referendum Party with the declared sole aim of forcing the government to hold a referendum on Britain's future in Europe.

The 63-year-old Anglo-French billionaire, who now spends much of his time in Mexico, denounces European Union meddling in British affairs and Britain's deteriorating sovereignty.

The Referendum Party currently has no MPs in the Commons, but claims to pose an electoral threat, particularly to the Tories, with its plan to run candidates in every seat where the main candidate is not committed to a wide-ranging plebiscite on Europe.

However, Bostock, who abandoned the Conservatives for the Referendum Party in the summer in protest over the Tories' European policy, said the party would never be able to carry out this strategy.

"The whole thing is a nonsense. It is just a complete and utter fallacy," he said.

He has now joined the anti-European Union UK Independence Party, which is in favor of Britain's withdrawal from the European Union.

A Referendum Party spokeswoman countered Bostock's criticisms, saying that he was leaving because of bitterness over his failure to drum up support for the party. (AFP)

Burmese Junta Announces Arrests of 47 People Following Student Unrest

BANGKOK – Burma's military junta on Tuesday blamed the opposition led by Aung San Suu Kyi for recent student protests here and said 47 people were in custody for their involvement in the unrest.

Speaking at a press conference Military Intelligence Chief Khin Nyunt said that 47 people, including 13 members of Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) remained in detention following the student unrest.

"The NLD together with other underground elements are found to be the main instigators of recent student unrest," Khin Nyunt said in a two-hour speech, presenting his case with an array of photographs and documentary evidence.

NLD officials said on December 22 that 64 members of the main opposition party had been picked up after a spate of student protests on the streets of Rangoon earlier this month.

Khin Nyunt, who did not take any questions, did not specify how many people were picked up following the student demonstrations but said the 47 were the only ones left in custody. (AFP)

China's Deng Xiaoping Rushed to Hospital

HONG KONG - China's patriarch Deng Xiaoping was rushed to hospital in Beijing for emergency treatment last week, a Hong Kong newspaper reported Tuesday.

The *Sing Tao* daily, which has close links to the People's Liberation Army (PLA), said the 92-year-old paramount leader was taken to military hospital No. 301 in western Beijing after his health "obviously deteriorated" in recent months.

There was no official confirmation or comment on the report from the Chinese authorities.

Quoting a source in Beijing, the Chinese-language newspaper said Deng received emergency treatment, but it did not specify his condition or what kind of illness he was suffering from.

According to Sing Tao's source, Deng has become a regular visitor to No. 301 hospital, the main Pla hospital.

Reports over Deng's health have regularly shaken stock markets but this time there was little reaction in Hong Kong or Shanghai.

Hong Kong's key Hang Seng index fell 0. 2 percent on Tuesday but traders said there was no link to the Deng stories. The Shanghai composite index fell 1. 8 percent, but Xin Jing, an analyst with Shenyin and Wanguo Securities Co. in Shanghai also said the Deng reports had no impact.

The report comes as state-run China Central Television (CCTV) is to start broadcasting a 12-part television series on the paramount leader from New Year's day.

Sing Tao, which once a week publishes a Hong Kong edition of the PLA-run *Liberation* daily as a supplement, said it was "unusual" for CCTV to start broadcasting a documentary film of a living state leader.

Newspapers in Beijing and Shanghai on Tuesday ran prominent photographs of Deng to announce the series.

The program will cover Deng's rise through party ranks through the Long March and the foundation of the People's Republic of China, and the downfall of the Gang of Four after Mao Zedong's death, which heralded Deng's return to power.

It will also include Deng's subsequent engineering of economic reforms that moved China onto the world trade map.

Deng was last seen in public during the February 1994 lunar New Year celebrations, when he appeared on television looking frail and ill.

His health has since been a source of frequent speculation for years, although family members continue to insist he will realise his ambition of seeing Hong Kong return to Chinese sovereignty on July 1, 1997. (AFP)

Leading Kenyan Opposition MP Quits Party, Parliament

NAIROBI – Leading opposition Kenyan MP Raila Amolo Odinga on Tuesday quit the official parliamentary opposition forum for the restoration of democracy to Kenya (Ford-K) Party.

Odinga told journalists here he was quitting the Ford-K Party, headed by the official opposition leader Michael Kijana Wamalwa, to end a year-long leadership struggle between them.

He said he was joining a new opposition party, the National Development Party of Kenya (NDPK), which is said to have been registered in the name of several Kenyan politicians, but has so far not been active.

He also announced he was quitting his parliamentary seat in line with constitutional rules.

Odinga, who has claimed several times to have deposed Wamalwa as the Ford-K Party chairman in a bitter leadership struggle over the past year, was officially the party's deputy director of elections.

He has been leading a splinter faction in the party since he fell out with Wamalwa in the run-up to abortive party elections on April 12, which had to be cancelled after a dispute over election delegates.

Despite the cancellation, Odinga's faction went ahead the same day and held its own elections, which President Daniel Arap Moi later said were properly held. Wamalwa meanwhile held his own faction's elections at the same venue the next day, but they were disputed by Odinga.

A consequent legal struggle culminated in a high court order last month confirming Wamalwa's faction as the incumbent Bona-Fide Party officials and ordering new elections to be held within three weeks.

Shortly thereafter, the issue took a dramatic turn when another court order granted Wamalwa's faction leave to discipline Odinga after the Attorney-General Amos Wako confirmed that another party had applied to the registrar to have the radical MP registered as its new leader, claims he has strongly denied.

Wako said his office had not approved the application because existing officials of the Moribund Labour Party of Kenya (LPK) had also petitioned the high court to stop the planned takeover.

Odinga is son of the late Odinga Odinga, the father of opposition politics in Kenya, who founded the Original Ford Party, which later split into two factions – Ford-Asili led by another opposition leader Kenneth Matiba, and Ford-K which the late Odinga led until his death in 1994.

(AFP)

300 People Trapped in Russian Tunnel

MOSCOW – About 300 people trapped by avalanches in a tunnel in the Caucasus mountains are in no danger, the Russian Emergencies Ministry said on Tuesday.

"Their evacuation is just a matter of time," a Moscow-based ministry spokesman said by telephone, adding rescue workers delivered fresh supplies to the trapped people on Monday.

Officials said on Monday it would take at least two more days to rescue the 300 people and their vehicles trapped since Thursday inside the four-km (2. 5 mile) Roksky Tunnel linking Russia's North Ossetia region with the breakaway Georgian province of South Ossetia.

ITAR-TASS news agency said on Monday two women had given birth while trapped in the tunnel and one new-born child had died of the cold. Two other people were reported to have died in the area over the weekend.

Rescue teams and doctors, entering the tunnel on foot, have managed to deliver food, medicine and warm clothing. Some of the trapped motorists refused to leave the tunnel in case their cars were stolen or looted, Russian news agencies said. (Reuter)

(Contd from Pg. 3)

FURTHER...

The first vice president stressed on Tajikistan playing a more active role in the bilateral economic cooperation.

Raabov on his part, announced supports of the Tajik assembly to the Irano-Tajik accords and expressed confidence that the present tour of Habibi to his country would bear positive results and would further deepen Tehran-Dushanbe economic relations.

Praising the relentless efforts of the Islamic Republic of Iran for the settlement of peace and tranquillity in the war-torn Central Asian Republic of Tajikistan, Rajabov expressed hope that Islamic Iran would continue its peace efforts in the next Tehran peace negotiation

(Contd from Pg. 5)

SWEEPING.....

expert at Tel Aviv University, said a tremendous income gap in Israel also contributed to workers' dissatisfaction. Recent statistics show the top 10 percent of wage earners make 10 times more than the lowest decile.

"The income gap in Israel nowadays is amongst the highest in the democratic industrial world," Globerson said. "This is no doubt a major, major reason for unrest." A weekend poll on Israel's channel 2 TV showed 59 percent of respondents had a negative view of Bibi's performance overall, compared to 36 percent who had a positive view. No error margin or sample size were available.

Ben Gurion International Airport, paralyzed by a wildcat strike Sunday, was not affected by Monday's protest. Sunday's action came after a top union leader was arrested for failing to show up at a court hearing. The strike ended five hours after a contempt-of-court charge against the union leader was dropped.

The strikes were estimated to cost the Israeli economy about 180 million shekels ($ 56 million). Israel radio said the government issued 500 back-to-work orders to essential Bezeq Phone Company employees and 50 to employees of the Rafael Military Industries. (AP)

Reward Offered After Surfing Dog Is Stolen

LONDON — A reward has been offered for the return of Max, the surfing dog, after he was stolen from outside a British supermarket while his owner was buying him a steak, newspapers reported on Saturday.

Pete Bounds, a former captain of the British Surfing Team, spent the Christmas holiday searching in vain for the four-year-old mongrel.

He has put up posters around the Welsh town of Haverfordwest and offered a 100 pound (170) reward in an attempt to recover Max, who has made several television appearances with his specially designed surf board and wetsuit.

(Reuter)

Man Tries to Rob King Tut's Treasures

CAIRO, Egypt — A man who tried to walk off with some of King Tut's priceless treasures - and then claimed to have been in the Egyptian Museum only to fix the plumping - was sentenced Monday to three years in prison.

A high state security court convicted and sentenced Amr Mohammed, an unemployed 25-year-old who was caught leaving the museum with an ancient dagger stuffed into his sock and two gold rings in his pockets. The conviction and sentencing were simultaneous. Mohammed was also fined 50,000 Egyptian pounds ($ 14,500), the daily Al-Akhbar newspaper reported in its Tuesday edition.

(AP)

OECD Unions Urge Korea to Veto Labor Law

PARIS - Labour unions from OECD countries called Tuesday on South Korean President Kim Young-Sam to veto a controversial new labor law which is fueling strikes in his country.

In a letter, the Trade Union Advisory Commitee (TUAC) of the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) said the new law would contradict pledges made by Seoul ahead of its entry into the EICD this month.

"The Korean governement made a solemn commitment to the OECD to reform its existing laws on industrial regulations to bring them in line with internationally accepted standards," said TUAC head John Evans.

"Instead of honoring this commitment it has taken a giant step backwards . .. The continuing restriction of free union activity combined with the removal of job security," said Evans, speaking on behalf of TUAC's 67 million workers.

South Korea officially joined the Paris-based OECD on December 12.

The new labor law, which the head of state has yet to sign, would allow management a freer hand in expanding working hours and laying off workers. It also bars multiple unions in a workplace for three years.

Seoul officials say South Korea does not regard the TUAC letter as representing an "official OECD position," adding that the TUAC is an advisory body working for labor unions of OECD members.

Enraged unionists started walkouts last Thursday when the ruling New Korea Party pushed the unpopular law through Parliament in the absence of the opposition, along with a separate law increasing secret police powers.

South Korea's largest labor federation on Tuesday warned that strikes would spread next month to the public sector.

(AFP)

Quake Measuring 5.9 Rocks Southern Mexico

MEXICO CITY — A large earthquake, measuring up to 5.9 on the open-ended Richter scale, rocked southern Mexico early on Tuesday but there were no immediate reports of deaths or damage, authorities and reports said.

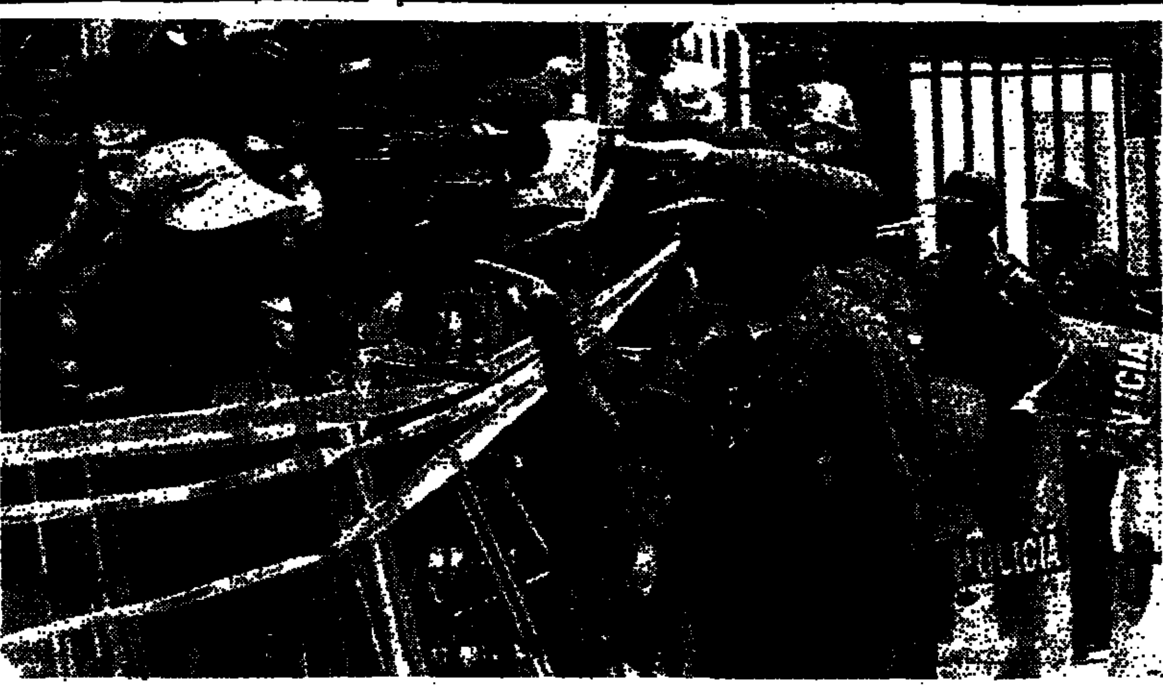
"The automatic reading we have is in the range of 5.8 to 5.9 near the coast of Chiapas," said Jim Taggart, of the U.S. National Earthquake Information Service in Golden, Colorado.

"We have not got a precise reading yet, we are still working out the details, but it was pretty powerful," Taggart told Reuters in a telephone interview.

News reports in Mexico said the quake was felt around 0642 local (0742 EST/1242 GMT) throughout the southern part of the country and even in parts of the capital.

National radio network Radio Red said their correspondents reported the quake frightened local populations in the states of Tabasco, Oaxaca and Chiapas.

(Reuter)



LIMA, Peru (Dec. 30): A Peruvian police officer argues with a Japanese member of the press who wants to move closer to the Japanese ambassador's residence in Lima, Peru, where 83 hostages are still being held. The rebel group Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement took over the house on December 17. (AFP PHOTO)

At Least 120 Killed as Snow and Ice Wreak Havoc Across Europe



FRANKFURT, Germany (Dec. 30): A railway employee clears the points at the Frankfurt main station to prevent the tracks from freezing. A white blanket covered the city after heavy snow falls over night when a temperature of nine degrees Celsius below zero was recorded. (AFP PHOTO)

PARIS — Much of Europe was braced for one of the coldest new year's on record as the number of deaths from the icy conditions climbed into three figures and transport networks including the Channel Tunnel suffered further disruption.

The death toll attributed to the glacial weather rose to at least 120 Tuesday, with few countries escaping fatalities.

Romania was worst hit, where a spokesman for the Pathology Institute said the cold rooms in the mortuary could no longer cope with the number of bodies since gravediggers have refused to work because the ground is frozen solid. Some 43 people have died in record low temperatures, 28 of them homeless, but the toll will almost certainly rise. There are no shelters for the homeless in Bucharest, and the thousands of children who live on the streets have been driven into the sewers to escape the cold.

At least 28 people are reported to have died of cold in Poland, 12 in France, at least 10 in Russia and eight in Germany.

Heavy snow fell in many parts of Europe overnight, including southeast England where it was blamed for the breakdown of a Paris-bound Eurostar train several miles into the Channel Tunnel between Britain and France on Monday evening.

The French rail company SNCF said the train suffered a problem with its engine due to a difference in temperature inside and outside the tunnel.. The train had to be towed out of the tunnel, triggering delays throughout Monday evening of up to five hours.

Around 300 people were still blocked Tuesday by avalanche snow after spending five days trapped in a road tunnel in the Russian Caucasus Republic of northern Ossetia.

Rescuers used explosives in an effort to blow away the mass of snow sealing them into the four-kilometer (two and a half-mile) tunnel, but work to free them is expected to take at least two more days according to a Russian government spokesman.

(AFP)

Pakistan Government Makes New Bid to End Political Corruption

ISLAMABAD — Pakistan's interim government has made a new bid to eradicate political corruption by empowering election tribunals to bar candidates who do not repay huge bank loans.

The cabinet of Malik Meraj Khalid amended the 20-year old people's representation act on Monday to authorize election tribunals to take action against defaulters, officials said.

The new law says tribunals can disqualify anyone who defaults on loans, taxes, government dues, utility charges or has had any loan written off.

Khalid's government has faced strong criticism of its alleged failure to catch major personalities accused of financial irregularities under successive governments.

The interim premier, who will rule until a general election on February 3, had promised to end corruption but recently conceded that it had been impossible to gather documentary evidence against suspect politicians and bureaucrats.

The election commission monitoring candidates for polls ordered by President Farooq Ahmed Leghari after dismissing Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto on November 5, accusing her of misrule and corruption.

More than 10,000 candidates have filed papers for the 217 National Assembly and 483 provincial assembly seats.

Government departments had released names of defaulters and candidates were asked to repay loans and clear utility bills by last Saturday, to avoid disqualification.

However many candidates, including some high-profile politicians, former MPs and senators, reportedly obtained court injunctions, claiming their names had been wrongly included in the defaulters list.

(AFP)

Indian Train Blast Toll 38, Appeal to Rebels for Talks

GUWAHATI, India — The government of the Indian state of Assam on Tuesday urged tribal militants to join peace talks after a terrorist bomb attack on a train left 38 people dead and 63 injured.

State Chief Minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta appealed to Bodo tribal guerrillas, suspected of having staged Monday's bomb attack, to join "unconditional talks" on their campaign for a tribal homeland in Assam.

"The militants are most welcome to come and have direct, unconditional talks with the Assam government or with New Delhi, whichever they feel best," Mahanta told AFP.

"The militants should come forward for talks instead of killing innocent people. We appeal to all sections of people to cooperate with us in our bid to fight terrorism."

Bodo separatists, campaigning since 1987 for a tribal homeland in Assam and adjoining states, have not claimed responsibility for the bombing.

The train, the Brahmaputra mail, was carrying some 1,500 passengers to Delhi when two bomb blasts occurred late Monday, near Fakiragram in the remote Kokrajhar district, 216 kilometers (133 miles) from here.

Early reports had put the death toll at more than 100.

(AFP)

Peru Informs Japan About Move in Hostage Crisis

TOKYO — The Peruvian government notified Japan on Tuesday to expect a major move later in the day toward a solution of the hostage crisis involving 83 captives in the Japanese ambassador's residence there, a press report said.

Diplomatic sources told Kyodo News that Lima had said its negotiations with leftist guerrillas who seized the residence in Lima, "have gotten better."

"There will be movement on December 31," a Peruvian government official told the news agency.

A Japanese government source in Lima said that, with the notification, "the Peruvian side for the first time indicated a target date for the solution (of the hostage crisis)."

Foreign Ministry officials here refused to comment on the Kyodo report from Lima.

"Basically, we think it is not desirable to comment on individual press reports," an official said, adding the Japanese government was working toward solving the crisis "in close contact with the Peruvian government."

Ministry spokesman Hiroshi Hashimoto told a brief press conference in Tokyo earlier Tuesday: "We should not switch from optimism to pessimism over each and every news report."

The 83 hostages held by the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA) entered their 14th day of captivity Tuesday amid frantic activity around the home of the Japanese Ambassador, Morihisa Aoki.

(AFP)

World Economy in 1997: Too Much of a Good Thing?

WASHINGTON — The world's economic expansion is expected to gather pace next year, analysts say, provided rich countries do not take wind out of it by trying to do too much of a good thing.

With the United States, Japan and Europe all seeking to slash government budget deficits in 1997, some analysts fear that the global upswing could falter under the weight of the policymakers' good intentions.

While budget cuts are generally good for the economy in the long run because they free resources for use by the productive private sector, they can drag down growth in the short term as government spending is cut and taxes are raised.

"We may have a synchronised fiscal contraction that leads to a cumulative global economic weakening," said Fred Bergsten, director of the Institute for International Economics Think Tank.

That is not the consensus forecast for next year. Most analysts see global growth speeding up in 1997, as Europe shakes off this year's doldrums, Japan's economy recovers further and the United States slows down slightly.

"The base case is for sort of middling growth, steady as she goes," said William Cline, deputy managing director of the Institute of International Finance, an advocacy group which represents banks and other financial market participants.

In its latest forecast, the International Monetary Fund predicted that world output will expand by 4. 1 percent next year. That would come on the heels of 3. 8 percent growth this year and would be the best performance since 1988.

Robert Hormats, vice chairman of Wall Street broker Goldman Sachs International, said the world economy has a lot going for it — inflation is moderate, markets are more open and budget policy more sensible.

But, like Bergsten, he worries that tight-fisted governments may be placing too much of a burden on monetary policy — lower interest rates — to generate growth in 1997.

Worries over EMU implications perhaps the biggest focus of concern is Europe, where countries are striving to cut deficits to meet tough criteria for participation in the 1999 launch of European Monetary Union (EMU) at a time when their economies are struggling.

"One of the biggest risks to the global growth scenario is Europe," said John Praveen, senior international economist at Wall Street Broker Merrill Lynch.

With unemployment in many European countries at or near record highs, consumers are unlikely to go on a buying binge, no matter how low interest rates are. And that in turn will make companies loth to spend more to add to capacity.

If growth does not pick up as expected in Europe, that would push up government spending on unemployment and other benefits and depress tax revenues. That in turn would force governments to tighten budgets further if they want to join EMU, aggravating the slowdown in a downward spiral.

Global investors are counting on the successful launch of the European single currency in 1999 and have placed bets accordingly. "If that doesn't happen, you could get almost a nuclear explosion in Europe," Hormats said, with interest rates in many countries rising and turmoil in currency markets.

Concern about Japan Bergsten also sees reasons to be concerned about the economic outlook for Japan. "I'm very sceptical about any significant pick-up in Japan," he said. "It's conceivable to me that Japan could drop into a new recession." Japan's recovery this year has been fuelled by stepped-up government spending. But fiscal policy is expected to turn restrictive next year, as policymakers raise taxes and rein in spending to trim Tokyo's bloated budget.

That in turn would put more of an onus on the U. S. economy to maintain the global upswing next year.

James Griffin, vice president of Connecticut-based AELTUS Investment Management, voiced concern that other countries were looking too much to America for growth by deliberately trying to depreciate their currencies against the dollar.

Cline pointed to another potential source of concern for the United States — the high-flying stock market that some analysts fear is setting itself up for a crash that could sap confidence and cripple the economy.

(Reuter)

Sweeping Strike Shuts Down Israel for Second Day

BEIT-AL-MOQADDAS — In a sign of growing dissatisfaction with Bibi Netanyahu, hundreds of thousands of Israelis walked off their jobs Monday to protest the prime minister's plans to raise taxes, slash services and sell state companies.

The strike also reflected rippling anger over Netanyahu's policy of funneling hundreds of millions of dollars to Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip - harming primarily his own low-income constituency in Israel.

The strike shut down the stock market, utility companies, day care, postal services, radio broadcasts, banks and seaports, and hampered public transportation and health care.

Late Monday, leaders of the Histadrut Union decided to end the strike everywhere but at seaports, Israeli media said. That was in reaction to the Knesset rejecting a government proposal to reduce tax deductions for married women, which the union opposed.

Earlier, Netanyahu charged the walkout - called by the Histadrut which is controlled by the opposition Labor Party - was politically motivated. "The workers themselves have no idea what the strike is all about," he said.

But critics of the Prime Minister note that his election in May has brought palpable economic malaise. Bibi's hardline policies have heightened Israeli-Arab tensions, which economists blame for the apparent end of a five-year economic boom.

Year-end figures released Monday showed that the economy grew in 1996 by only 4 percent to 5 percent, compared to over 7 percent the previous year. Next year's figure is expected to fall close to zero per capita.

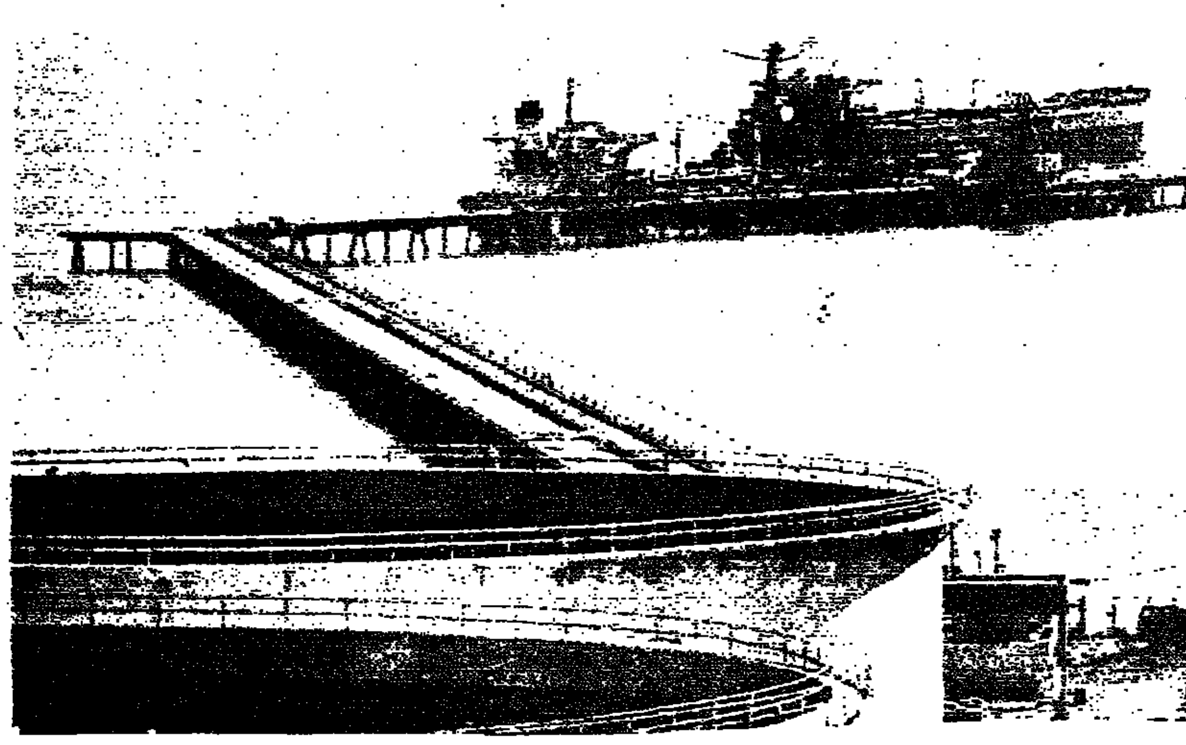
To offset the resultant declining tax revenues, Bibi has moved to raise taxes and slash the $ 53 billion 1997 budget by some $ 2 billion. The plan would reduce spending on social services, impose new taxes on gas and cigarettes and raise income tax.

Meanwhile, labor has estimated that government subsidies to the Jewish settlements will cost the taxpayers $ 300 million a year.

Amir Peretz, the Histadrut Chief, said that as a result of the government's policies every worker will lose 2,500 shekels ($781) to 3,000 shekels ($938) a year.

Arye Globerson, a labor studies

(Contd on Pg. 15)



YUMURTALIK, Turkey (December 16): Tankers at the oil terminal of the sourther Turkish Mediterranean port of Yumurtalik are loaded with Iraqi crude oil from an Iraqi-Turkish pipeline. The resumption of Iraqi oil exports for the first time in six years under an easing of the UN embargo against Baghdad will provide a major economic boost for Turkey which was also hit hard by the sanctions.

(AFP PHOTO)

Malaysia's Islamic Bankers Try to Go Global

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia — Fawzi Ahmed was more concerned with morality than profit when he opened an account in 1983 at fledgling Islam, the first in Malaysia run by Islamic principles.

Most important• was Islam's ban on interest payments as usury. Fawzi and Muslim depositors would not be paid interest on the money in their accou rather, they would share in the Bank's profits on its investments in businesses.

But ask Fawzi, a municipal surveyor, why he uses Bank Islam today, and h doesn't even mention religion.

"Convenience. It's near my office in city hall," Fawzi said one sunny morning outside one of the Bank's branch offices in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia's bustling capital. "They have checking, everything I need." Once used only by the pious, Islamic banking has taken off in Malaysia as a consumer industry offering mortgages, an Islamic Credit Card and a growing array of sophisticated financial services.

With government encouragement, the country's financiers are trying to use their innovations to take the lead in a multi billion-dollar global industry founded in egypt three decades ago.

Islamic banks are common in the Middle East, and have sprung up as far away as London and the philippines. The theocratic leaders of Iran and Sudan require their bankers to do all of their business by Islamic guidelines.

The bedrock of the industry is the ban on interest payments, which are regarded by the koran, Islam's holy book, as exploitation because depositors and lenders make money without providing labor or sharing risks.

Islamic banks pool deposits to invest in construction, commodities trading and other businesses that don't profit from interest payments.

Commercial borrowers pay the Bank and its depositors a share of their profits instead of interest. That involves risk, because the Bank doesn't know in advance what the profit will be.

Led by giants like Saudi Arabia's Al-Rajhi Banking and Investment Corp. , which has $ 8 billion in assets, the world's Islamic bankers are believed to preside over total deposits of up to $ 70 billion.

That's still less than the resources of a single big western or Japanese Bank. But rapid growth in the industry has prompted Citibank and other major international banks to open Islamic subsidiaries.

In malaysia, Bank Islam's deposits have grown to some 3 billion ringgit ($ 1. 2 billion), while other banks have followed in its footsteps by opening separate teller windows to handle Islamic transactions.

One institution, Arab-Malaysian Bank, has issued southeast Asia's first Islamic Credit Card - an interest-free Visa Card.

Users can charge an amount equal to their deposits in the Bank, and the fee is a percentage of their annual spending.

Eager to emphasize their market appeal, Islamic bankers point out that they also attract thousands of mortgage borrowers from the Chinese and Indian minorities in Malaysia's population of 17 million people.

The cost of an Islamic mortgage is about the same as standard home financing. But borrowers are lured by its simple terms - a flat monthly fee that eliminates the uncertainty of variable interest rates often used by traditional banks.

One institution, Bank Rakyat, says only 2,000 of its 14,000 depositors in interest-free Islamic accounts are Muslims.

"People are looking at the bottom line. There will be times that Islamic banking is cheaper, some times that it is more expensive," said Wan Ismail Yusuf, chief executive officer of Bank Islam's Research Institute.

Wan Ismail, dapper in a pinstriped suit and blue tie, is part of the cosmopolitan face of Malaysian Islamic banking. His 27th-story office could be in London or New York, except for the arrow on the ceiling pointing toward Mecca, which he faces five times a day for prayers.

Religious scholars at the institute review Bank Islam's new products and sell consulting services to some of Malaysia's other banks. They have advised would-be Islamic bankers in the Philippines, Indonesia and Brunei.

To attract foreign investors, the government of Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad also is developing 'Islamic Capital Markets' using specially designed interest-free bonds and other securities.

Malaysian ambitions to be a Muslim version of Wall Street are part of Mahathir's effort to promote the country as a role model for Islamic societies in embracing high technology and modern finance.

Eight Malaysian Islamic investment funds hold shares worth 2 billion ringgit ($ 780 million) in 330 carefully screened companies. Approved stocks can't be linked to liquor, gambling or other enterprises believed to be sinful.

"We feel that we have a good chance of attracting Muslim money from the region and farther away, the Middle East or wherever," said Nik Ramlah, an official of Malaysia's Securities Commission.

"At the end of the day, it has to be sufficiently attractive, and it could attract non-Muslim as well as Muslim capital." The real prize would be a share of the hundreds of millions of dollars held idle by Muslims in the Middle East for lack of suitable investments.

"The cash is there. The question is whether Malaysia uses enough (religious) rigor," said James Drummond of *the Middle Eastern Economic Survey*, a business magazine based in Nicosia, Cyprus.

Conservatives criticize Malaysia for letting banks conduct Islamic and interest-paying services under the same roof and Islamic stockbrokers handle companies that make some of their profit from interest payments.

Skeptics also say its goal of a full-fledged Muslim financial system is impossible, because Bank accounts and other interest-earning activities are an inescapable fact of modern corporate life.

"That concern is true," Nik said. "But it just underlines the need to introduce the necessary Islamic financial products to meet the needs of modern investors."

(AP)

Mother Teresa 'Miracle' Bun Draws Nashville Crowds

NASHVILLE, Tenn -- Hundreds of people have flocked to a small Nashville coffee shop to see a "miraculous" likeness of Mother Teresa -- on a cinnamon bun.

Visitors were lining up at the Bongo Java Coffee Shop to stare at the bun, which was glazed and put on display in a glass cabinet after a customer who bought it remarked how its shape looked like the Roman Catholic missionary.

The cinnamon bun is said to bear an amazing likeness to the nun's face, complete with her head covering. Most customers smile at the sight, but some regard it as a genuine miracle, said coffee shop owner Bob Bernstein.

"It started out as a fun thing," said Bernstein, "but it's attracting an awful lot of attention."

"Yes, that's Mother Teresa all right," one customer said.

The bun was made on October 15 and local musician Ryan Finney was about to take a bite when he noted the uncanny resemblance.

"I almost ate it," he said. The staff decided to preserve it, and a young Nashville filmmaker even made a short movie that reportedly has sold 100 copies.

Shop manager Ann Loree says the staff have a lot of fun with their hard work and "We think that spirit is why we were chosen for the Mother Teresa cinnamon bun." They plan to put a picture of the bun on the Internet.

Quoting a saying by Mother Teresa, the Nobel Peace Prize winner who is recovering at her home in India from heart surgery, Loree said: "Where there is great love, there are always great miracles." (Reuter)

Woman Stabbed 113 Times

MACON, France -- French police questioned several people recently after the body of a woman aged 20 was found at the side of a forest track with 113 stab wounds to her abdomen, police said.

The woman, Christelle Bletry, was found by a postman on Saturday near Blanzy, central-eastern France, where she lived.

She was last seen late Friday night when she left a friend's house to return home.

A post mortem showed she had not been sexually assaulted, but owing to the extreme cold, it was not possible to establish the exact time of death.

Police said there was no immediate suspect. They were concentrating their inquiries on Bletry's circle of friends, and interviewed her boyfriend who was later released. (AFP)

A White Surprise in Rome as Snowflakes Fall

ROME -- There wasn't enough for a snowman or even a respectable snowball. But there were plenty of surprised looks into the gray clouds.

It snowed in Rome.

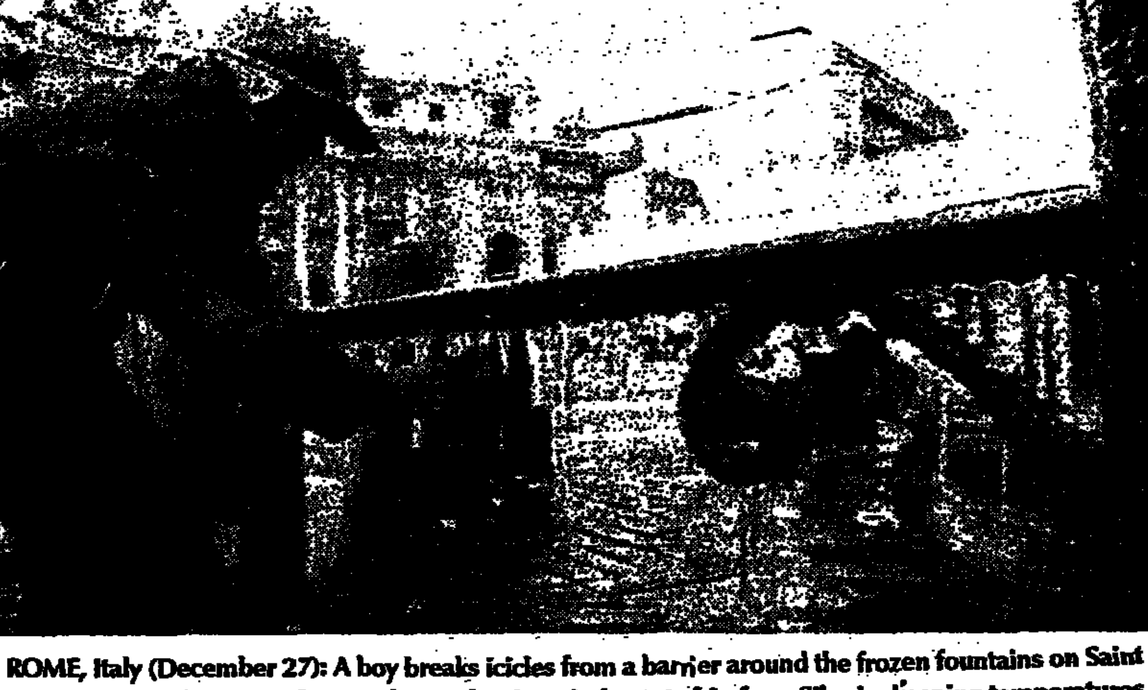
The last dusting of snow in Rome was more than a decade ago: February 10, 1986. A few inches fell in January 1985.

This time, flakes mixed with rain in the center on Sunday. In some of the hilly areas of the city, however, enough snow fell to briefly cover cars and sidewalks.

Children scooped up some snow with their fingers and adults reminisced about the previous white winters in Rome.

Although low-lying Rome rarely gets snow, it's common in mountainous areas throughout Italy.

The latest cold snap has plunged temperatures below zero in many parts of the country and brought snow as far south as Sicily. (AP)



ROME, Italy (December 27): A boy breaks icicles from a barrier around the frozen fountains on Saint Peter's Square, in Rome. Europe shivered as icy winds gusted in from Siberia, keeping temperatures below freezing in a cold spell which has already claimed about 60 lives. (AFP PHOTO)

U.S. Minorities Face Growing Gap in Student Achievement

WASHINGTON -- U.S. minority students who were once narrowing the student achievement gap with their white counterparts are again falling behind, according to a recent report.

The *New York Times*, citing a study by the non-profit National Research Group Education Trust, reported that the gap in overall test results between white and black students declined by about 50 percent in the 1970s and 1980s.

The gap between whites and Hispanics fell by about one third, the report said.

"Between 1970 and 1990 we made quite extraordinary progress in narrowing the gap between white and minority kids, but the gap by all indications is widening again," said Kati Haycock, director of the education trust.

Figures varied for different grades and subjects. On science tests, black 17-year-olds scored 54 points below whites in 1969 on a scale of 500 points. In 1986 the figure was 45 points and in 1994 49 points. The maths gap was 40 points in 1973, 21 points in 1990 and 27 points in 1994.

Hispanics in that age group scored 44 points lower than whites in science in 1982, 34 points lower in 1992 and 45 points lower in 1994. In reading, they scored 41 points below whites in 1975, 22 points below in 1990 and 33 points below in 1994.

The education trust report said financial resources, teachers' pay and teachers' training reflected a continuing difference in access between whites and minorities.

The report said the current effort to set higher standards for all children was an important part of reversing the trend. Minorities have often been graded with lower standards than whites. (AFP)

Another Child Has Hair 'Eaten' by Doll

GREENVILLE, South Carolina -- In the third such incident since Christmas, a little girl's hair got caught in the mouth of a battery-powered doll that mimics eating.

Three-year-old Carly Mize started crying when her doll snagged her hair, and her mother said a patch of hair was pulled right out of her scalp.

"I thought maybe she had stuck her finger in the doll's mouth, so I checked her fingers, but she was still crying," said her mother, Tammy Mize of Easley. "When I picked carly up, the doll was attached to the back of her head."

The Cabbage Patch Snack Time Kid Doll, which is supposed to "eat" plastic french fries and other fake food, has no on- off switch, and Mrs. Mize said she tried to pry the doll off Carly's head with no success.

"It kept rolling her hair inside the head," she said. "It pulled her hair completely from the root. She is completely bald for maybe a hands-length all the way down the back of her head."

Carly had received the doll for Christmas and the incident happened while she was shopping with her mother in a Greenville store.

Also last week, a doll belonging to 7-year-old Sarah Stevens of Griffith, Indiana, had to be taken apart piece by piece when it chewed its way up her hair to her scalp.

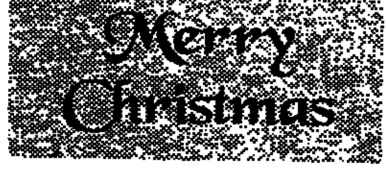
Sarah's aunt, Kelly Nagy, and the owner of the hair salon where the incident happened, worked 30 minutes to free the little girl's hair.

"She must have had it lying by her hair, and it must have sucked it down," Nagy said.

Early Saturday, one of the dolls chewed the hair of 7-year- old Amanda Gomez of New Haven, Connecticut. Her family told WFSB-TV that emergency workers had to take the batteries out of the doll and cut the girl's hair to free her.

Fewer than 10 such incidents have been reported to the doll's manufacturer, Mattel Inc., since it went on the market in September, company spokeswoman Lisa McKendall said.

"They've been isolated incidents," she said. "All of our products go through rigorous safety testing. We would never introduce a product that we didn't feel passed all the ... requirements." (AP)



Police Seeking Ex-Prisoner Over Swiss Train Robbery

GENEVA -- Police probing a train hold-up earlier this month are seeking an ex-prisoner who boasted of his plans for a mail robbery and may have met great train robber Ronald Biggs.

Police Chief Paul Bezencon told Swiss Romande Television recently that the man, identified only as Hansi S., 46, had told fellow inmates before his release from jail on December 10 that he was planning to pull off "a big job".

It would not be a bank robbery but a mail van raid, he had said.

The day after, five masked gunmen robbed a Zurich-Geneva train of 20 sacks of mail containing an estimated half a million Swiss francs ($400,000) and got clean away. (AFP)

Indonesian Paranormals See Another Gloomy Year

JAKARTA -- Indonesian paranormals have predicted another gloomy year for their country in 1997 in an annual survey published by the *Jakarta Post* newspaper recently.

The same group of seers last year forecast with a degree of accuracy that the political temperature would soar and corruption, manipulation and collusion would run even more rampant. They also predicted increased natural disasters.

"The year of 1997 will not be better than 1996. Wicked people will be more vicious. Those in power will be more arrogant and mean," prominent soothsayer Ki Ageng Selo was quoted as saying.

Hundreds died in a ferry sinking in Aceh in February and the nation was shaken by the death of the President Suharto's wife in April. Earthquakes struck remote provinces throughout the year, while floods in the capital killed more than 20 people.

Predictions of soothsayers are watched closely by a large number of Indonesians, including some in high positions, who still hold to many superstitious values despite rapid modernization.

In a recent scandal, for example, a local official from Yogyakarta was found to have paid more than 400,000 to a seer, said to be acting as an intermediary, so he could be reappointed for another term.

Politics in Indonesia this year was dominated by the government-backed split in the Indonesian Democratic Party (PDI) when its leader Megawati Sukarnoputri was ousted by rival Surjadi in a party congress in Medan in June.

Megawati's supporters were violently evicted by police from PDI headquarters on July 27 in an act which triggered widespread rioting in the capital, the like of which had not been seen for more than 20 years. Five people died on that day.

Ki Gendeng Pamungkas, who claims to have learned voodoo in Nigeria and Haiti and to have killed hundreds of people with black magic, predicted a recurrence of such an event.

"A bloody riot such as the one on July 27 this year might happen again in 1997," he was quoted as saying.

Pyschic Mama Terate was less specific, saying: "The year 1997 will be an unfavorable year for everybody on this planet."

Putri Wong Kam Fu said 1997 was not only the year of the ox, but the fire ox, so there would be a tendency for many things to be turned upside down. "The situation will be uncertain and chaotic."

Selo had predicted last year that advocates of democracy, including non-government organizations and students, would forge an alliance between June and August.

"The situation will be hot, but it will be under control. The election will run smoothly. The PDI, now torn by internal conflict, will see a brighter future. There will be a reconciliation between its chairman Surjadi and Megawati in April," he was quoted as saying.

Permadi Satriowiwoho, convicted in 1995 for blasphemy after giving a speech, said 1997 would be an unpredictable year because it was the climax of the "crazy era" in the Javanese cycle.

"There will be more natural disasters like earthquakes, typhoons, volcanic eruptions and there will be more riots, violence, murders and terrorism involving not only civilians but armed forces members and government officials," he said. (Reuter)

Queen Elizabeth II Is Getting Keen to Party

LONDON -- Having had it up to here with her children's divorces, Britain's Queen Elizabeth II is thinking of celebrating her 50th wedding anniversary next year in grand style.

Buckingham Palace revealed recently that the queen and Prince Philip are toying with the idea of inviting thousands of other long-married couples to a "joint celebration" garden party.

"But before any announcement can be made, all the practicalities have to be considered," a royal spokesman said.

If it goes ahead, the bash should go some way to erasing the bad memories of the past year's sensational divorces of Prince Charles from Princess Diana, and of Prince Andrew from the former Sarah Ferguson.

One event to mark the anniversary of the November 1947 wedding of the then Princess Elizabeth with Prince Philip of Greece -- now officially known as the Duke of Edinburgh -- is the biggest horse show ever to be held in Britain.

Some 1,000 horses are to participate in a 90-minute spectacular at Windsor Great Park, west of the British capital, celebrating the queen's passion for all things equestrian. (AFP)

16 Elephants Die of Starvation in Indian State

GUWAHATI, India -- At least 16 elephants at sanctuaries in the eastern Indian State of Assam have died of starvation, officials said recently.

"About 106 elephants owned by the State Forest Department are facing starvation as supply of elephant feed has been stopped due to paucity of funds," an official of the Assam Wildlife said on condition of anonymity.

The official said contractors have stopped supplying elephant feed to the Kaziranga and Manas sanctuaries due to non- payment of bills by the state government.

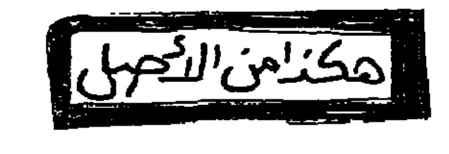
"A number of these elephants are also suffering from diseases," he said.

The forest officials use the elephants to patrol the sanctuaries for illegal poaching of one-horned rhinoceros -- an endangered species.

Nagen Sarwah, the state forest minister said the government would take immediate measures to make available more funds.

"Steps are being taken to release funds for supply of elephant feed. I will make sure these animals will not go without adequate food," Sarwah said.

India has 80 national parks, 441 wildlife sanctuaries and 35 zoological gardens, covering nearly 4.5 percent of its geographical area. (AFP)



Prof. Reza Nasiri Visits Gilan Province Charity Institutions

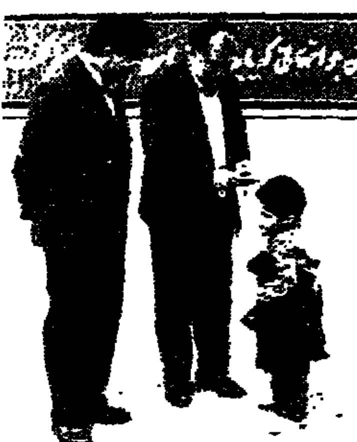
During his trip to Iran, Professor Reza Nasiri, the youngest Iranian expert residing abroad, visited Gilan Province's charity institutions for the handicapped and the elderly as well as Rash Society for the Orphans.

Welcoming Prof. Nasiri, Mr. Rezvan, managing director of Gilan Province charity institutions, elaborated on the status of these institutions:

Gilan Nursery House for the Handicapped and the Elderly is home to some 600 handicapped and the elderly, consuming an annual Rls. 5,000,000,000. Also Mozhdehi Charity Institute in Rasht houses over 95 unattended children in different ages day and night. The institute is financially supported fully by the philanthropist Iranians both from inside and outside the country.

During his hours-long visit to different sections of Gilan Nursery *House for the Handicapped &* the Elderly and Rasht Mozhdehi Society for the Orphans, Prof. Nasiri talked on the welfare facilities of the nursery institutions saying:

With respect to the point that I have visited charity institutions in over 42 countries of the world, I can say truly that due to the efficient management of Mr. Rezvan and medical supports of doctors



Prof. Nasiri (L) in his visit to Rasht Society for the Orphans.

such as Dr. Barzigar as well as modern medical facilities, this nursery institution is exemplary in the Middle East. On my return, I will do my best to attract world medical and welfare societies' supports for this charity institution.

It should be noted that, during his visit, Prof. Reza Nasiri granted considerable cash to Rasht Mozhdehi Society for the Orphans.

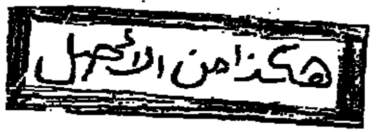
Those interested in granting financial supports for Gilan Nursery House for the Handicapped and the Elderly may deposit their cash at central banks Rasht:

Malli: Acc. No. 90006, Tejarat: 6848, Saderat: 2780, Mellat: 56662, Refah Karegaran: 570.

Account numbers for Rasht Society for the Orphans:

Acc. No.s 1179 and 1032 with Rasht Malli Bank, Central Branch.

Prof. Reza Nasiri (2nd R) visits Gilan Nursery House for the Handicapped and the Elderly.



An Interview With Ilam Governor General

Ilam Province, Pioneer in the Country's Construction Projects



Engineer Ali Akbar Sh'abani Fard, Ilam governor general revealed that 800 construction, cultural, sports and economic projects concurrent with the blessing visit of the president of Islamic Republic of Iran will be inaugurated, visited and put into operation in the province.

Engineer Sha'bani Fard said, "Some 1,757,702,416,536 rials have beenallocated for implementation of these projects."

He added, "The most important projects which will become operational in Ilam Province during the president's visit are: Ilam 1000-Head Slaughterhouse Complex, Science and Cultural Complex, Ilam Entrance Highway, 350 residential units for the unattended, and Pump Station and Irrigation Network of Amir Abad and Mehran.

"Also the exploitation of tens of thousands of producing, industrial, construction, and cultural projects including Sazbon Dam and Power Plant having 1,608.5 million cubic meter volume of reservoir in normal balance and Hini Mini Dam and Power Plant enjoying 32,115.66 million cubic meter volume of reservoir in normal balance will be started in Ilam Province.

He pointed out that the construction trend in Ilam Province which experienced deprivation in the oppressor Shah regime as well as eight years of the imposed war has been accelerated and it is expected that this border province will witness greater changes in cultural, economic, and social development through exploitation of the implemented projects and start of anticipated projects during President Hashemi Rafsanjani's visit to the province.

Engineer Sha'bani Fard expressed his appreciation to the de-



A view of Ilam Industrial Township

trial, job-creating, and construction projects will be started simultaneous with the president's visit to Ilam Province."

Ilam governor general went on saying that the executive operations of tens of thousands of pro-

voted officials of the country for their great attention to the war-stricken and border province and said, "After the imposed war, some 1,191 construction projects have been implemented and become operational per year on average."

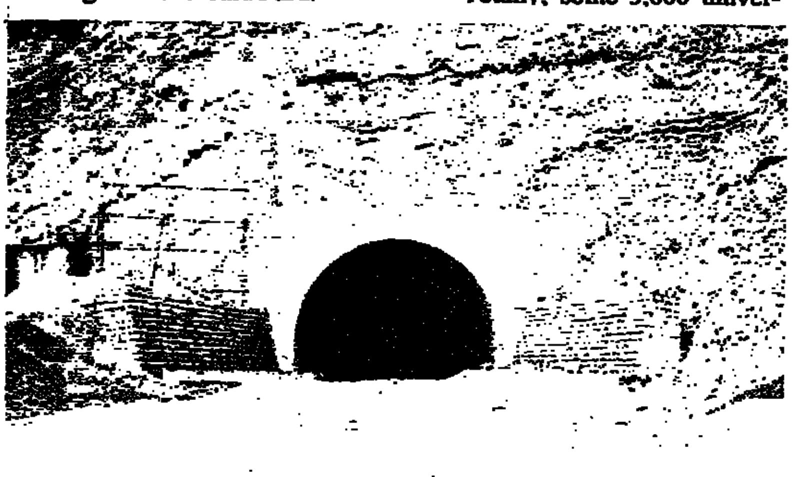
The governor general of Ilam added that some 8,337 small and giant projects in the form of 2,954 plans have been executed during the first economic, social, cultural and political development plan and by the end of 1374.

Engineer Ali Akbar Sha'bani Fard said that some 551,680,135,000 rials as national and provincial credits have been spent for implementation of these projects.

According to the governor general, 24,986 units out of 27,900 rural and urban residential, commercial and guild units damaged in imposed war have been reconstructed and renovated.

He revealed that some 202,469,77,000 rials have been allocated from credits of Headquarters for Reconstruction and Renovation of War-Stricken Areas for reconstruction of the above-mentioned residential units.

"The number of provincial hospitals have now reached 5 hospitals from one hospital before the Islamic Revolution and the number of beds have been increased to 500 beds from 60 ones," continued Engineer Sha'bani Fard.



Ilam Azadi Tunnel

He claimed that there is now one hospital bed for every one thousand people in Ilam Province and added that the rural health centers of the province have reached 163 units from 27 units before the Islamic Revolution. Also the number of provincial general practitioners, specialists and dentists have reached 270 people from 46 people before Revolution.

In recent seven years, some 810 educational units enjoying 3,773 classrooms and totally 345,860 square meter built area have been constructed in the province, i.e. 46.8 square meters educational areas in the region per day on average, according to the governor general.

Engineer Sha'bani Fard said that the Grand Leader in his visit to Ilam Province in Day of 1369 approved the implementation and running 110 construction and producing projects in deprived and remote areas of the province and at present the region has greatly changed through exploitation of 95 percent of the projects.

He added that some 27,163,223,000 rials from credits for eradication of deprivation have been spent for the aforesaid projects.

The governor general of Ilam went on saying that the number of provincial higher education centers have been increased to 3 university units from one institute before 1375. These three consists of Ilam big university, Payam Nour University, and Medical Sciences University. In addition to these units, the state management center has been set up during the recent two years.

"Totally, some 3,600 university students are studying in 30 fields in these centers," continued Engineer Sha'bani Fard.

He added: The almost ten-fold increase in the number of public libraries and cultural complexes from two to 19 during the past seven years has revolutionized the whole province.

Engineer Sha'bani Fard went on to say: The total built area for the indoor sports arenas of the province has been almost duplicated from 6,710 sq.m at the beginning of the First Five-Year Development Plan to 11,610 sq.m at the end of 1995.

The governor general of Ilam Province continued: The total land area for the open sports fields of the province has been increased from 76,485 sq.m to 120,500 sq.m.

Referring to the services rendered to the rural areas, he said: After the end of the eight-year imposed war and by the end of 1995, 500 villages were supplied with water and the other 400 villages were supplied with electricity.

Developments in 53 villages, inauguration of 141 telecommunications units, 43 post units, submitting 25,080 telephone lines to the public, establishing 4,013 km of main, side and gravelled roads, are among the other achievements of the Islamic government during the last seven years.

The governor general of Ilam



Engineer Ali Akbar Sha'bani Fard, Ilam governor general

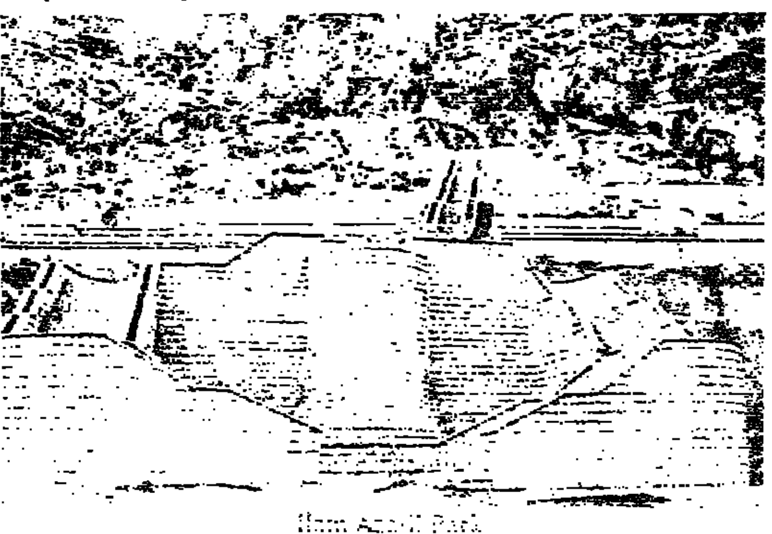
Province referred to dam construction activities in the province, adding: Creation of 82 diverting dams in different regions of the province has transformed 42,195 hectares of dry farming land to irrigation farming lands.

Engineer Sha'bani Fard also said: The operational works of 9 reservoir and diverting dams are to be launched in near future in Ilam Province, the inauguration of which will transform the province into one of the pillars of agriculture in the country.

With respect to reconstruction of the war-striken areas he said: Since the end of the imposed war, some 98 percent of the 12,000 residential, trade, administration, education, cultural and productive units destroyed during the war has been reconstructed in the border cities of Mehran and Dehloran.

He added: At present, 85 percent of the 100,000 population of these regions have returned to their motherland and maintained their agricultural, animal husbandry and production affairs.

Engineer Sha'bani Fard pointed to the newly established airport of Ilam saying: Inauguration of the airport has created many employment opportunities for the expert manpower in the province.



Ilam Azadi Park

Two under progress projects are Azadi 1,170m tunnel and Ilam cement factory. Materialization of the said projects not only connects Ilam region to other neighboring regions but also it will bring about economic development for the province.

He went on to say: Before the revolution there had been only 16 active industrial and productive units in Ilam Province, but after the revolution almost 700 factories, productive workshops, as well as industrial and cooperative units have been created in the province.

During the past 17 years there has been invested some 200 billion rials on activation of the industrial and productive units in the province.

The said units, creating some 20,000 job opportunities, are active in foodstuffs, ferrous and nonferrous mines, textile, cow and calf raising, egg and meat chicken husbandry, animal husbandry, marine creatures, handicrafts, and industrial & agricultural sectors.

The governor general of Ilam continued: Due to the existence of 1,650,000 hectares of pasture and forest lands in Ilam, the province has had considerable developments in animal husbandry ever since the culmination of the Islamic Revolution.

At present, 300,000 animal husbandry units are kept by the villagers and nomadic tribes of the province. Every year a surplus of 300 domestic animals, 8000 tons of red meat, 680,000 kg fleece, soft fleece, animal fat, dried whey, and 500,000 animal skins are offered to the domestic markets.

Engineer Sha'bani Fard went on to say: For the promotion of animal husbandry in the province, the plan of organizing 11,000 nomadic families with a population of over 75,000 people has been launched in Mehran and Dehloran regions. So far 148 nomadic families have been housed in Mohsen Abu Chalab region, Mehran.

The governor general of Ilam Province concluded: Ilam Province enjoys four permanent rivers with a flow rate (run off) of 300,000,000 m^3. The inauguration of 82 diverting dams and 180 pumping stations after the imposed war, almost 1,800,000,000 m^3 of the river water has been controlled

Ilam Province's Iran Tannin Manufacturing Plant Awaits Start



Mr. Abdulmalek Armoun Pour, chairman of Iran Tannin Co.'s Board of Directors: Our laboratory is the most modern in the western part of the country. It has a research and development certificate from the Ministry of Industries.

The plant for producing tannic and gallic acid along with their derivatives has received the principal establishment license from the Province's General Bureau of Industries after years of experiments conducted by Tehran University's Department of Chemistry at the College of Sciences.

Mr. Abdulrazzaq Armoun Pour, the managing director of Iran Tannin Company took part in an interview to elaborate on the way the company was established. "This company was founded in 1992 on a one-hectare land area with two thousand square meters of build area. It cost $250,000 plus an additional 1.65b rials. The company is manned with 40 people directly and creates jobs indirectly for hundreds more who collect the natural forest products," he said.

"We are producing one of the world's best tannic acid powders derived from the natural raw materials available in the country's western forests. According to the tests conducted in the nation's modern laboratories, our tannic acid matches well the quality of the tannic acid produced by Germany's Merck Co.," Mr. Armoun Pour said.

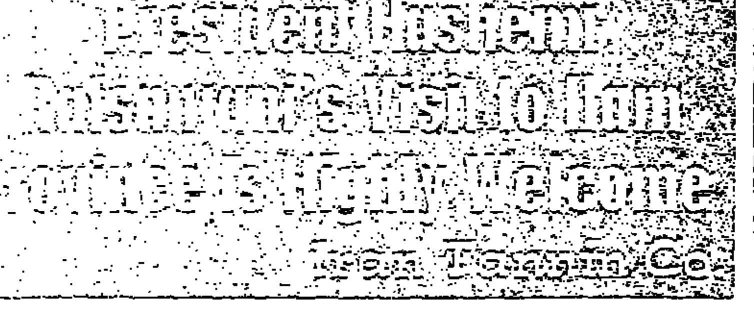
"Tannic acid powder and gallic acid as well as their by-products have many applications. In the pathobiological laboratories and pharmaceutical industry they are used in making burn ointments, and mouth-washing liquids. Also in textile industry, they are used as color mordants and fixatives, in fishing nets as enforcers, in manufacturing paper they are used for giving measurements, in ink manufacturing they have some applications, in oil rigs they dilute the digging mud, in photography (development and printing) they are the laboratory's medium material identifiers and in steam tanks they are plaque removers," he added.

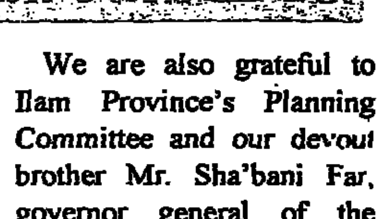
"Their derivatives having wide applications are very precious such as gallates used as preservatives in the food industry specially in animal fat and vegetable oil, industrial oils, etc ...," he emphasized.

"Another product used in tanning and leather making is a type of tannin powder which has proven to be stronger than the foreign types," he added.

The managing director also announced his company's readiness to supply the raw material for all leather-making units around the country in order to reach self-sufficiency.







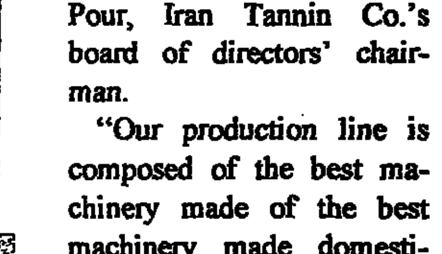
He also asked the ministries of industries and commerce to withhold from importing the pure tannic and gallic acid powders or the raw materials for tanning at high prices.

Mr. Soofi, the representative of the Ministry of Industries stressed the same point while visiting Iran Tannin Co.

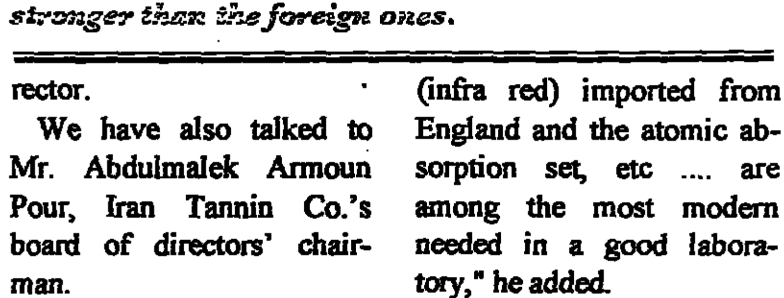
"We are grateful to the Great Leader of the Revolution, the Honorable President and the Cabinet who are paying special attention to the underdeveloped, martyrdom-seeking and martyr-raising province of Ilam.

We are also grateful to Ilam Province's Planning Committee and our devout brother Mr. Sha'bani Far, governor general of the province and his deputies and all other officials in various provincial bureaux, "said the managing director of Iran Tannin Co.

We are all awaiting anxiously to have our plant inaugurated by the honorable flag bearer of construction, President Hashemi Rafsanjani.



"We have contacted some European countries to export our products such as England, Germany and Switzerland with success," concluded the managing director.



Mr. Abdulrazzaq Armoun Pour, the managing director of Iran Tannin Company: We are producing one of the world's best tannic acid powders derived from the natural raw materials available in the country's western forests. Another product used in tannin and leather-making is a type of tannin powder which has proven to be stronger than the foreign ones.

We have also talked to Mr. Abdulmalek Armoun Pour, Iran Tannin Co.'s board of directors' chairman.

"Our production line is composed of the best machinery made of the best machinery made domestically from stainless steel such as extraction reactors, paint removers, condensers and the heating and drying models (spray drier), the chairman said.

Our laboratory is the most modern in the western part of the country. It has been granted a research and development certificate by the Ministry of Industries. Equipment such as gas chromatographic, CLC/FT-IR (infra red) imported from England and the atomic absorption set, etc .... are among the most modern needed in a good laboratory," he added.

"The company's products are tannic and gallic acids, gallates, cleansers and chemicals," he said.

"In the field of education, we are offering a short course on applied chemistry (laboratory) which includes laboratory and industrial workshops safety, solution making, important measurements (acid and base measurements), iodometry, chlorometry, manganometry, quality and quantity control of industrial products, etc ...," he added.

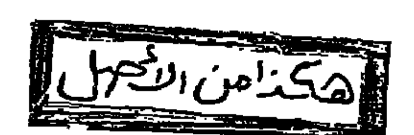
"We need a large sum of money in order to reach full production capacity, and while we have received help from provincial authorities, we are still in need of much more help," he stressed.

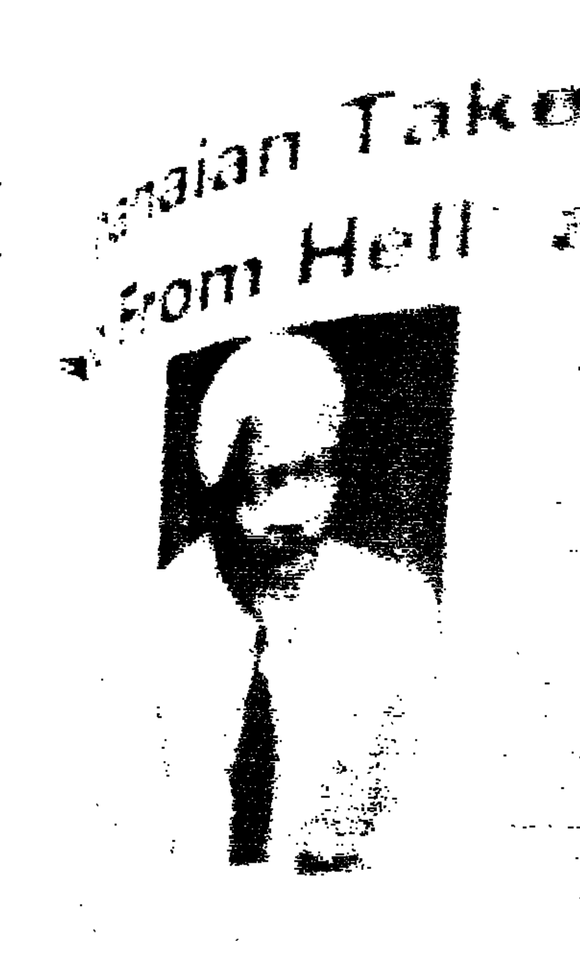
"Since we suffered a lot during the war in Ilam, we should now be allocated with all the needed foreign currency and the national authorities should pay special attention to our province," concluded the chairman.



Iran Tannin Co.'s Lab.







Ghanaian Takes on "Job From Hell" at UN

UNITED NATIONS — Kofi Annan takes over as UN chief on Wednesday amid hopes that the Ghanaian's appointment will bring improved relations with the world body's main contributor, the United States.

His predecessor, 74-year-old Boutros Boutros-Ghali of Egypt, who was backed by France for a second term, saw UN relations deteriorate with Washington over the past two years.

For U.S. public opinion, Boutros-Ghali became identified with the UN failures in Somalia and Bosnia. But he also sinned in U.S. eyes by taking an independent stand on issues such as Iraq and the Middle East.

Annan, 58, who said in a recent television interview that a friend had described his new post as "a job from hell," has made it clear that a main priority will be ensuring that Washington pays its arrears.

While keeping a steady hand on reform efforts during his five-year term, and refusing to rule out more staff cuts, the soft-spoken Annan also intends to seek consensus on the role of the United Nations as the world body prepares to enter the next century.

As former undersecretary general for peacekeeping, he plans to develop UN readiness to intervene in crises before they become full-scale conflicts. His main focus will be on his own continent.

In his new job, Annan will walk a tightrope as the servant of 185 nations in the General Assembly where some states are more equal than others — particularly the "big five" in the powerful UN Security Council.

Annan's relationship with the five states with veto power — Brit-


ANNAN

ain, China, France, Russia and the United States — will be particularly crucial.

Washington vetoed Boutros-Ghali's reelection to a second term, theoretically because he was not sufficiently committed to reform.

Annan, described as an "honest broker" by diplomats who worked with him on Bosnia, stresses that he will preserve the independence of his office. He notes that as a UN insider, having spent his entire career in the UN system, his "track record" is known to all.

Annan's election on December 17 by the UN General Assembly was warmly welcomed by U.S. President Bill Clinton.

When U.S. Ambassador Madeleine Albright Telephoned Annan to congratulate him, she told him that it was the first time that such a "special relationship" would exist between a U.S. Secretary of state and a UN Secretary General, a U.S. official said.

Albright is currently nominee for secretary of state.

Clinton administration officials are confident that with the change at the UN helm, the Republican-dominated congress will now agree to pay the $1.3 billion in arrears owed to the United Nations — almost half of the total $2.2 billion owed to the organization by member states.

Congress had linked any payment to the departure of Boutros-Ghali, saying that more reforms were needed.

Although the New York Times reported Monday that congress had rejected the latest U.S. plan to clear the debt, a U.S. permanent representative to the United Nations, Edward Gnehm, told reporters here that he was "not nearly as pessimistic as the article."

Other UN officials are also optimistic that the new UN chief will be more inclined to be a team-builder than his predecessor, who was accused of arrogance by his detractors.

General Assembly President Razali Ismail of Malaysia told AFP that he hopes to work with Annan to "unblock every aspect of the glitches we have with the major countries, particularly the U.S."

Getting fresh U.S. commitment to the United Nations, where Washington has been attacked by its partners for its failure to pay its dues, could lead to progress on reform in a number of areas.

Boutros-Ghali leaves New York on Wednesday for a stopover in Paris on his way to Egypt where he plans to write books.

Annan and other UN officials insist that despite his ouster by the Americans, Boutros-Ghali will be positively judged in the history books for his tenure as the first post Cold war UN chief.

(AFP)

Rights Groups Hail Rwanda Trials, but Say Flawed



PARIS — Two human rights groups on Monday hailed the start of genocide trials in Rwanda but slammed the court hearings as superficial and flawed by a lack of defence lawyers.

The Paris-based International Federation of Human Rights Leagues (FIDH) and the New York-based human rights watch/Africa said they "welcome the holding of trials in Rwanda but deplore serious irregularities".

The first genocide trials in Rwanda opened on Friday in the southeastern town of Kibungo, where two men pleaded not guilty to organizing massacres. Two other men appeared in court on Monday in Kigali but their cases were immediately adjourned.

"In the genocide trials, the accused did not benefit from the assistance of a lawyer, which represents a particularly serious violation of their rights considering they risk the death penalty if found guilty," the two groups said in a statement.

Those convicted on charges of taking part in the 1994 slaughter of an estimated 800,000 Tutsis along with Hutu moderates face the death penalty after one chance of appeal.

The FIDH and human rights watch dismissed Rwanda's arguments that it lacked cash for defence lawyers, saying the UN had given up a project to supply lawyers in 1995 after opposition from Kigali's government.

"Political opposition is a factor as strong as the lack of funds," the rights groups said.

They also deplored "the summary character" of the trial on Friday of Deo Bizimana, a former medical assistant, and Egide Gatanazi, a former local administrator, both accused of organizing massacres.

The statement said the trial lasted only a few hours and the prosecutor merely summarized witnesses' charges rather than allowing the defendants to be confronted by their accusers, a right under Rwandan law.

About 90,000 Rwandans are crammed into jails since being accused of taking part in the 1994 slaughter by Hutu troops, militias and mobs.

(Reuter)

Message of Pope for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace

(January 1, 1997)

Offer Forgiveness and Receive Peace

1. Only three years separate us from the dawn of a new millennium. This time of expectation is a time for reflection, inviting us to make an assessment, as it were, of mankind's journey in the sight of God, the Lord of history. If we look back on the last millennium, and on this century in particular, it must be acknowledged that mankind's path has been greatly illuminated by progress in the socio-cultural, economic, scientific and technological spheres. Unfortunately, this new light coexists with persistent dark shadows, especially in the areas of morality and solidarity. Then there is the real scandal of violence, which in old and new ways still strikes many human lives, and tears apart families and communities.

The time has come for a resolute decision to set out together on a true *pilgrimage* of starting from the concrete situation in which we find ourselves. At times the difficulties can be daunting: ethnic origin, language, culture and religious beliefs.

A Wounded World Yearns for Healing

2. As I have said, the modern world, despite its many successes, continues to be marked by contradictions. Progress in industry and agriculture has brought a higher standard of living to millions of people and offers great hope for many others. Technology has shrunk distances, while information has become instantaneous and has made possible new advances in human knowledge. Respect for the environment is growing and becoming a way of life. A great army of volunteers, whose generosity often remains hidden, is working tirelessly in every part of the world for the good of humanity, sparing no effort especially in meeting the needs of the poor and the suffering.

How can we fail to acknowledge with joy these positive aspects of our times? Unfortunately, however, the present world scene also presents *more than a few negative signs*. These include materialism and a growing contempt for human life, which have now assumed disturbing proportions. Many people live their lives with no other allegiance than to the laws of profit, prestige and power.

As a result, many feel imprisoned in a deep inner loneliness. Others continue to be deliberately discriminated against on grounds of race, nationality or sex. Poverty is driving masses of people to the margins of society, or even worse, to extinction. For too many people war has become a harsh everyday reality. A society interested only



in material and ephemeral goods is tending to marginalize those who are not useful to its purposes. Faced with situations like these, involving real human tragedies, some prefer simply to close their eyes, taking refuge in indifference.

The Burden of History

3. The difficulty of forgiving does not only arise from the circumstances of the present. History carries with it a heavy burden of violence.

Practical Mechanisms for Reconciliation

4. Wars, even when they "solve" the problems which cause them, do so only by leaving a wake of victims and destruction which weighs heavily upon ensuing peace negotiations. Awareness of this should encourage peoples, nations and states once and for all to rise above the "culture of war,"

not only in its most detestable form, namely, the power to wage war used as an instrument of supremacy, but also in the less odious but no less destructive form of recourse to arms as an expeditious way to solve a problem. Precisely in a time such as ours, which is familiar with the most sophisticated technologies of destruction, it is urgently necessary to develop a consistent "culture of peace," which will forestall and counter the seemingly inevitable outbreaks of armed violence, including taking steps to stop the growth of the arms industry and of arms trafficking.

But even before this, the sincere desire for peace has to be translated into a firm decision to remove every obstacle to achieving peace. Here, the conflicts are sown, they can reach individuals directly, mediating between opposing factions and promoting mutual trust.

Truth and Justice: Prerequisites for Forgiveness

5. Forgiveness, in its truest and highest form, is a free act of love. But precisely because it is an act of love, it has its own intrinsic demands: the first of which is *respect for the truth*. God alone is absolute truth. But he made the human heart open to the desire for truth.

Another essential requisite for forgiveness and reconciliation is *justice*, which finds its ultimate foundation in the law of God and in his plan of love and mercy for humanity. Understood in this way, justice is not limited to establishing what is right between the parties in conflict but looks above all to re-establishing authentic relationships with God, with oneself and with others. Thus there is no contradiction between forgiveness and justice. *Forgiveness neither eliminates nor lessens the need for the reparation* which justice requires, but seeks to reintegrate individuals and groups into society, and states into the community of Nations. No punishment can suppress the inalienable dignity of those who have committed evil. The door to repentance and rehabilitation must always remain open.

Opposition Veteran in Singapore's Most Intriguing Poll Contest

SINGAPORE - Opposition veteran Joshua Benjamin Jeyaretnam is fighting to reenter Singapore's Parliament, after a 10-year absence from the electoral arena, in the most intriguing contest of this week's polls.

The fiery Jeyaretnam is leading a Workers' Party (WP) team in the multipleseat parliamentary district of Cheng San against a ruling People's Action Party (PAP) slate headed by Education Minister Lee Yock Suan, 50.

The WP veteran, who in 1981 became independent Singapore's first opposition member of Parliament, has been dismissed as a rip van winkle trapped in a time warp by PAP leaders, but shows no loss of his combative spirit or rhetorical flare.

Dressed in a "power to the people" T-shirt, Jeyaretnam is on the campaign trail plugging greater openness, checks on price rises and ministerial salaries, easing of strict controls on car ownership and a loosening of the PAP's unbroken hold on power since 1959.

"The one thing you have to achieve is to break this monopoly, this stranglehold on power that the PAP now has," the man known to both opponents and supporters as "JBJ" told an election rally attended by several thousand.

He says a victory, which would in one stroke send five members to Parliament in winner-take-all multiple-seat system in Thursday's election, would be a present for his 71st birthday on January 5.

His chief opponent, the soft-spoken education minister, retorted that it was time that voters gave JBJ a "rousing sendoff" from politics.

The Cheng San election, described by leading local newspaper *the Straits Times* as probably the "hottest ward" because of Jeyaretnam's presence, is one of the most closely watched of 36 parliamentary contests.

Sri Lankan-born Jeyaretnam, who trained as a lawyer in London, became the first opposition member of Parliament in independent and multiracial Singapore when he won a 1981 by-election in the Anson constituency dominated by port workers.

He says the "spirit of Anson" is in the electoral air this time, with voters in Cheng San saying "Anson, Anson" when they greet him on his "walkabouts" around the constituency.

Jeyaretnam, who won reelection in 1984 with a bigger majority and was seen as thorn in the side of then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, is returning to the hustings after a decade's absence.

"I've waited, waited, for 10 years I've waited," said Jeyaretnam after filing his nomination papers.

To a PAP MP who called him a "tired old man," he said: "ask him to come and see

me at the hustings and see whether I'm a tired old man or is it Mr. Lee Kuan Yew. .. " veteran leader Lee now holds the title of senior minister.

Jeyaretnam was suspended from Parliament for five years in November 1986 when he was found guilty of making a false declaration of his party's accounts and fined a sum which made him liable to expulsion from the legislature.

He was also successfully sued for libel by Lee Kuan Yew and narrowly escaped bankruptcy and had to stay out of the electoral arena in 1988 and 1991, when the polls were held two months before his disqualification expired.

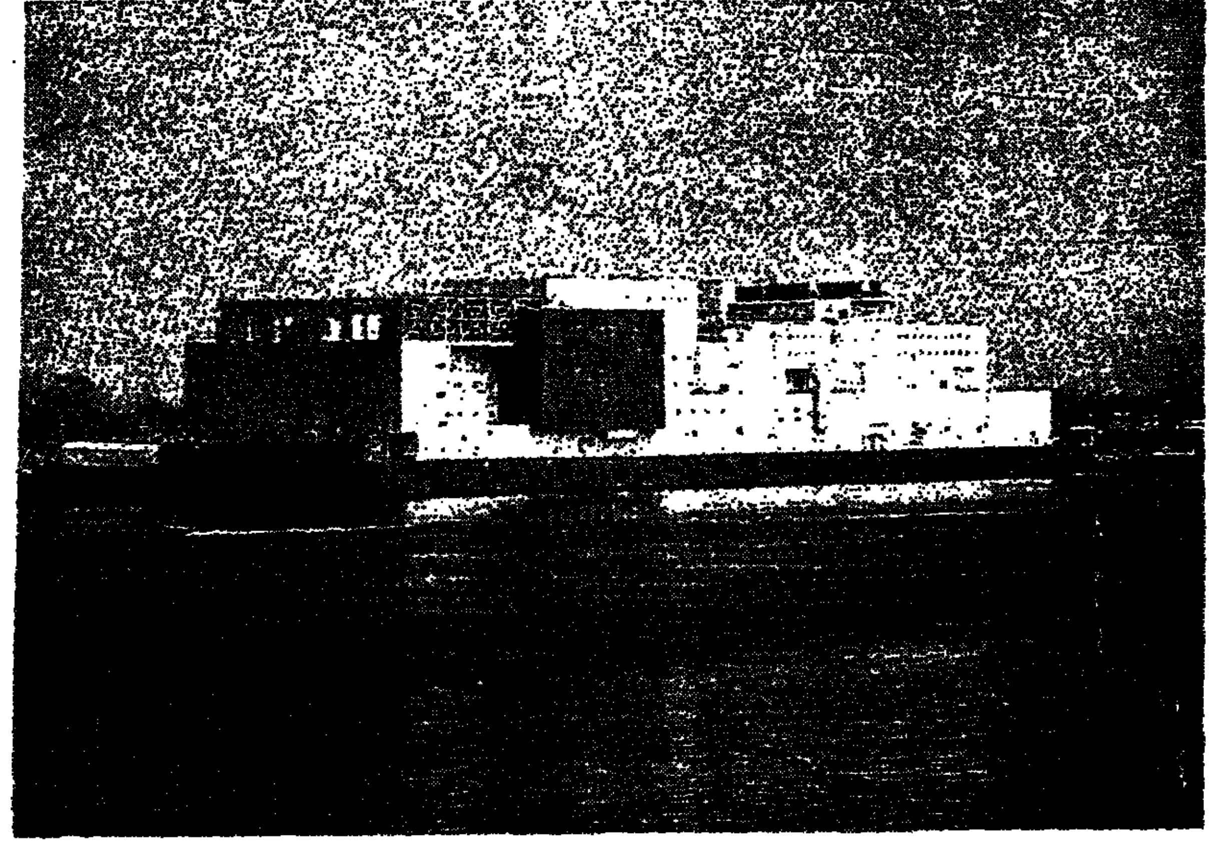
However, he did not contest a December 1992 by-election.

On his team is controversial lawyer Tang Liang Hong, 61, who has been dubbed a Chinese-language and anti-Christian chauvinist and therefore a "dangerous man" by PAP leaders, including Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong.

Tang said in an election speech he had joined Jeyaretnam, a Christian and Tamil, for the "sacrifices" the veteran made.

"He used to stay in a Bungalow comfortably. It has been sold. It is finished. But his courage is not finished," Tang said.

(AFP)



NEW YORK, NY, United States (December 30): The Vernon Bain Facility, a prison barge on the East River in New York, is shown in this undated handout photo. The prison is operated by the New York City Department of Corrections and held 797 inmates. It is docked in the Hunts Point section of the Bronx in New York.

(AFP PHOTO)

Indian Missile Program Continues, Despite Concerns

NEW DELHI - Ignoring warnings from the United States, India is beefing up its missile capacity after rejecting global calls to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.

India successfully tested its Trishul (trident) surface-to-air missile Sunday and said it would soon test launch an enhanced version of its Agni (fire) ballistic missile.

Indian defense analysts defended the decision to step up India's missile program, despite concerns of a possible arms race with arch-rival Pakistan, saying New Delhi should already have a long-range missile capacity.

"India should go ahead with the deployment of missiles of all ranges. A long-range missile is an absolute necessity," said Jasjit Singh, director of the Institute of Defense Studies and Analysis (IDSA) think-tank.

"Our cities will be undefended without a long-range missile.

Everybody is going ahead with their missile deployment programs and so should India," he said.

Singh said an Agni-type missile required three dozen tests before deployment.

"It will take 10 years for completion of these tests to end," he said.

"Are we waiting for the enemy to arrive next door and then jump into action?" The Agni, designed to carry a one-ton nuclear or conventional warhead, was first test-fired on May 22, 1989, and has been successfully tested three times since.

The Trishul is one of five guided missiles locally designed and developed as part of India's ambitious program, launched in 1983 to build an arsenal of rockets and missiles, and has been dubbed by analysts as India's answer to the U.S.-made Patriot.

Military experts here have welcomed the resumption of the Agni project, which was put on hold by the previous government under intense pressure from the United States. That government was voted out in May.

Washington feared the Indian missile program could trigger an arms race in the sub-continent.

Pakistan has also voiced fears, saying the Indian missile development program would lead to a race for weapons of mass destruction in South Asia.

The two countries, which have fought three wars since 1947 and are believed to be in possession of technology to make atomic bombs, have rejected the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and the Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty.

"We have a deadline of less than three years for the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. By then we should have moved forward on the nuclear option," said Singh, of the IDSA.

"And, unless we have a delivery system (like Agni), why talk of the nuclear option?" Officials sources, speaking on condition of anonymity, said though India has deployed Prithvi (earth) surface-to-surface missiles, Pakistan has an edge with m-11 missiles acquired from China.

"The threat from China is more serious as it has developed a family of missiles with various ranges," one government official said.

India suspects China is sharing nuclear technology with Pakistan in violation of international commitments. China is also suspected of selling nuclear ring magnets to Pakistan in 1994 and 1995.

Beijing has never acknowledged that the transaction took place.

India and China fought a brief border war in 1962, but relations between the two Asian giants have been on the mend in recent times.

Military experts, however, feel the missile program itself cannot provide security to India, whose million-strong army, one of the largest in the world, is facing a cash crunch and a serious shortage of manpower.

AFP

Dangerous World: Experts Disagree on Just How Bad It Is

WASHINGTON - With all the pain and suffering caused by wars, it shouldn't be hard to figure out how many there are in a year.

But the National Defense Council Foundation has more than twice as many battle zones on its year-end list as the more-liberal Center for Defense Information. And the CIA has yet another count of 1996 conflicts.

There's also considerable disagreement over whether the world was more or less violent in 1996, or what can be done to stop the bloodshed from ethnic conflict, insurgency, drug violence, civil unrest and civil war.

The Virginia-based foundation, which sees protection only in increased U. S. military spending, is releasing a list Monday of 64 world hot spots - down from the record 71 it counted a year earlier. The count reverses a seven-year trend, but conservative analysts caution against lowering vigilance.

"The meaning of the whole thing is that the United States shouldn't be unilaterally disarming in the face of a conflictive world," said retired Major F. Andy Messing, the foundation's executive director. "Just because we've had the first downward trend doesn't mean that 1997 will be a more peaceful year. " The Center for Defense Information, which says more arms breed more conflict, is preparing its own report listing 27 active conflicts and 10 more that have turned mainly nonviolent but still are unsettled. The group counted only 20 active wars last year.

"You can throw any arbitrary criterion in that you want," said retired Adm. Eugene Carroll, the center's deputy director. He said that even though the center's list remains shorter that the foundation's list, it still shows far too much bloody conflict which cannot be reduced with more U. S. aircraft carriers and high-tech bombers.

The Central Intelligence Agency, which withholds details of its list, tallied 28 conflicts in 1996, with several dropped and others added since last year's count of 27.

CIA spokesman Mark Mansfield said the agency lists only those areas with "high levels of organized violence between states or between contending groups within a state or with high levels of political or societal tension likely to erupt into violence. " Mansfield pointed out that the intelligence community lists conflicts, while other groups list countries affected by wars.

Private groups also are far less restrictive in their definition of war.

Obviously, war-counting is an inexact and complex task. Defining war by assigning a threshold of casualties is impossible, when neither side in battle offers reliable information or access by objective observers.

The picture is further blurred with spreading and shifting conflicts like the trouble in the Balkans and Central Africa.

The National Defense Council Foundation, for example, counts Serbia and Bosnia as separate conflict areas, while the CIA combines them into the Balkan conflict.

The foundation says its longer list includes all world conflict areas, without regard to how many people were killed, injured or displaced.

Listed conflicts range from civil war in the Balkans to drug violence, organized crime and terrorism in the United States.

Troubles with the Irish Republican Army in Ireland and great Britain were dropped from the list with hopes for peace in 1995 but restored in 1996.

Other violence-torn areas added this year were Bahrain, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Cyprus and Zaire.

Fourteen countries were dropped from the list because of reduced violence: Bolivia, Chad, Comoros, Georgia, Ghana, Honduras, Jamaica, Laos, Mali, Moldova, the Philippines, Senegal; Venezuela and Yemen.

While the two organizations disagree on how much military power the United States needs in the post-Cold-War world, they agree on the need to stop weapons proliferation.

Messing, who served as a U. S. special forces officer in 27 conflicts before joining NDCF, saic the United States "should be completely vigilant, especially abou nuclear, biological and chemica weapons proliferation. A lot o these countries that are starting t become bellicose are getting ac cess to proliferated items. "

Carroll said that despite h group's increased count of co flicts, his overall analysis points decreased violence over the p year. But he said far too ma weapons of war remain loose the world.

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Americans Are Alienated, but Less Than Last Year

WASHINGTON - Americans are less alienated than a year ago, though its still near record levels, according to an annual poll published on Sunday.

The Harris Alienation Index, which has tracked a remorseless rise in public alienation since 1966, fell to 62 percent in 1996 from a record high 67 percent last year.

But pollsters at Louis Harris and Associates Inc. Said the improvement might be just a short-term blip since earlier improvements were quickly reversed.

When the Harris Organization first asked the five different questions it uses to measure public alienation in 1966, the index stood at 29 percent.

The average for the 1990s so far is 64, higher than in the 1960s when it was 34 the 1970s when it was 52 and the 1980s at 57.

Humphrey Taylor of the Harris Organization said the improvement in 1996 probably reflects the strength in the economy, the growth in the numbers of jobs and the sharp drop in crime rates.

The telephone poll of a nationwide cross-section of 1,000 adults was conducted Dec. 12-16. The poll has a margin of error of plus or minus three percentage points.

They were asked their feelings about the following statements: The rich get richer and the poor get poorer what you think doesn't count very much anymore most people with power try to take advantage of people like yourself the people running the country don't really care what happens to you you are left out of things going around you.

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